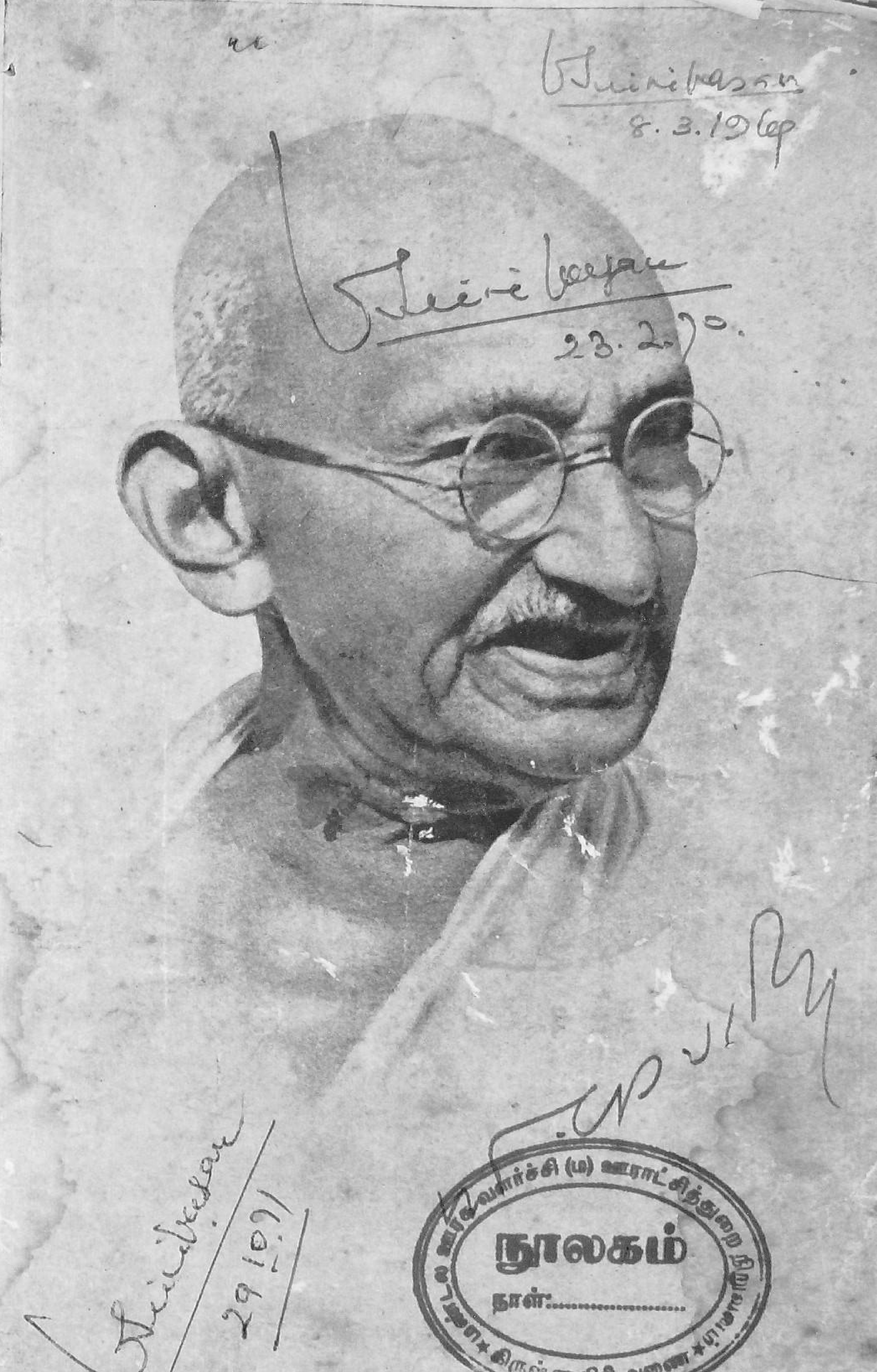

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A GUIDE BOOK FOR GRAMA SEVAKS

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GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

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A GUIDE BOOK

FOR

GRAMA SEVAKS

PUBLISHED BY
THE RURAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT

Srinivasan
8.3.1969

FOREWORD

MADRAS was the first State in India to take up in right earnest Rural Reconstruction work on Gandhian lines. The scheme was started in 34 selected firkas in 1946 and was subsequently extended to 50 more. Two "Vidyalayams" (schools) were opened, one at Kallupatti for the Tamilnad and the West Coast and the other at Gopannapalem for the Andhra Desa, for training the field workers—"Grama Sevaks" and others. The need for a book of this kind both and to systematise the instruction imparted in these two schools to guide and aid the "Grama Sevaks" in dealing with the various problems which they have to face in their work has been felt almost from the very commencement of the training classes. The Government entrusted the preparation of the book to Sri G. Venkatachalapathy, the Director of Rural Welfare and the well-known Constructive Workers, Sri G. Ramachandran and Sri R. R. Keithan. In addition to their rich and varied experience in this field of work elsewhere, they have been intimately connected with the Scheme ever since it was launched in this State in some capacity or other and as such have had ample opportunities of closely studying its actual working and assessing its merits and drawbacks. This book is the outcome of their joint efforts.

2. Just as no two men are alike in all respects no two villages present the same features or problems to the worker; so the book does not seek to place in the hands of the "Grama Sevak" any set patterns or uniform programmes of work. In the earlier chapters, it explains in a remarkably lucid and impressive style the background of the Gandhian approach to the rural problem in India and the origin of his Constructive Programme so as to enable the "Grama Sevak" fully to understand and appreciate in their proper perspective the

several steps set out in a later chapter, which he has to take in in his day-to-day work.

3. I commend this book not only to the "Grama Sevaks" for whom it was primarily intended and to whom it will, doubtless, prove to be an invaluable guide, but also to the general public, who, I feel sure, will greatly benefit by a perusal of this very interesting and instructive book with its masterly exposition of the Gandhian outlook by one of his closest associates.

4. On behalf of the Government, and on my own behalf I have great pleasure in acknowledging with gratitude the services rendered by Sri G. Ramachandran and his colleagues.

P. S. KUMARASAMY RAJA,
The Chief Minister to the
Government of Madras.

MADRAS,
30th January 1952.

Camp: MADRAS,
January 29, 1951.

From

SRI G. RAMACHANDRAN,
Secretary, All-India Village Industries Association,
Wardha.

To

THE SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT,
Rural Welfare Department,
Fort St. George, Madras.

SIR,

Let me recall how the Sub-Committee appointed to draw up a Guide Book for Grama Sevaks originally met on 15th November 1949 in Ghandigram. For obvious reasons such a book could not be written at one sitting. The Committee, therefore, discussed in detail what should go into the Guide Book and prepared a synopsis of **headings for seven chapters** and of the detailed points to go into each chapter. The Committee then decided to entrust me with the work of writing the hand-book on the basis of the synopsis prepared by it. Due to heavy pressure of my own work as the Secretary of the All-India Village Industries' Association, I could not attend to the work till now. The Sub-Committee met again on 19th January 1951. Sri R. R. Keithan and Sri G. Venkatachalapathy, the Director of Rural Welfare, were present. It has taken ten days to complete the work. I am, therefore, sending you to-day the manuscript which has run to 85 typed pages.

The most important chapter is the one entitled "Grama Seva, Step by Step" and it is the longest chapter containing detailed guidance for the Grama Sevak in the very difficult work he has to do. But not one of the steps will be fully

understood without a careful study of the ideology and methodology of the Constructive Programme as explained in the earlier chapters. The last chapter entitled "Looking ahead" is meant to give the Grama Sevak a proper perspective and the inspiration that the work he is doing is of the utmost significance.

Unfortunately, my original manuscript is in English and I am afraid that many of the Grama Sevaks will find it difficult to study the Guide Book in English. May I therefore suggest that it may be translated immediately into the regional languages and published in them and in English.

Let me acknowledge with sincere gratitude the help I received from Sri R. R. Keithan of Gandhigram in writing this Guide Book. He discussed with me the various important points included in the book and corrected the first draft of the manuscript. Sri G. Venkatachalapathy was with me throughout and suggested the various points which should be stressed in guiding the Grama Sevaks in their work in the firkas.

I am sorry even now the work had to be done in some hurry due to my pre-occupations with other work elsewhere. But I have tried hard to give the Grama Sevak the guidance he will need in implementing "The General Plan for Firka Development Work". I have made it clear in the body of the thesis that nothing I have written is sacrosanct or final and that ultimately the Grama Sevak will have to work guided by his own understanding and by the objective conditions in the village. In other words, the Grama Sevak will depend more on himself than on anyone else.

Yours faithfully,

G. RAMACHANDRAN.

A GUIDE BOOK FOR GRAMA SEVAKS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BACKGROUND.

Our villages have a very old background. They are perhaps the oldest institutions in India. Let us make no mistake about it; our villages were and are nothing less than institutions. If anybody thinks that the Indian village is merely a collection of houses at some spot, it will not be easy to understand the village at all. The village has through many centuries represented the growth of life and culture in India. It has remained the basic unit of our social organization and nothing that has happened up till now has changed its fundamental character. What we have to realize is the unbroken continuity of a great village tradition beginning with the Vedic times and coming down to the present day. Can all of us not admit straightaway that, the fact that what was important in the ancient times still remains equally important, is a matter of great significance in the history of social evolution in our country? Is it not, therefore, necessary and reasonable that, we study the traditions and way of life embodied in the institution of the village with care and even with some reverence?

The village as a community and an institution is mentioned even in the literature of the Vedic period. It assumes even more importance in the times of the Buddha. Historians have testified that Village Republics existed at the time of Alexander's invasion of India. The word 'Panchayat' is one of the oldest in our country and indicates the first seeds of democracy in our history. The ancient village panchayat represented village self-government in all its aspects. A study of the history of Panchayat Raj in India is well worth the time and effort. Mahatma Gandhi conceived of Indian Swaraj as Panchayat Raj. In recent years, Governments of various States in India have passed Panchayat Acts in an attempt to revive the technic of building up freedom from the bottom.

Numerous monarchies and empires have come and gone throughout the centuries in India. The Afghans, the Mughuls, the Hindus and the European powers have ruled in India sometime or other. All these have disappeared but the village community still remains as the centre of organized life in India. Whatever breaking up of village life has taken place occurred only under British rule. The Hindu, the Afghan, and the Mughul rulers never attempted to shatter village economy. So long as taxes were paid and law and order maintained, villages were left free to govern and develop themselves in their own way. Agriculture, numerous handicrafts, religion, literature and the arts all grew up in the villages and the villages thus became the home of all our political, economic, cultural and spiritual traditions. But under

British rule, the rulers lived in the cities and the towns, protected by forts, and surrounded by officials and middlemen. The few hundred towns which grew up under British rule did so without any relation to the social, cultural or even the true economic needs of the country. They grew rather in relation to the needs of the British rulers whose main business was the exploitation of the country in every direction. If, therefore, we leave out the small number of cities which have an ancient background, the others are products of an alien element which took possession of India. Is it any wonder then that most of our towns grew at the cost of the villages? Raw materials were purchased at low cost, local handicrafts were either killed or allowed to die out and then came the import of manufactured goods of every description from the outside. All power progressively shifted to the towns where the officials lived. First in importance in the town was the agent of British authority, next came the various subordinate officials and finally the Indian middlemen who helped the ruling classes to make the maximum of profits. There was one more new community which steadily grew up in the towns and this was the servant class recruited for domestic and office service. This is very briefly how our towns grew up, drawing their sustenance, material and human, from the villages. It was in the shadow of such a development that the villages weakened slowly, steadily and continuously, under British rule. The miracle is that, even under such a process the villages remained without having been totally broken up and destroyed.

And luckily before final ruin overtook the villages, came the freedom movement in India, and Mahatma Gandhi, who put the whole might of his great personality into the work of rebuilding the villages. The whole work of Mahatma Gandhi may well be summed up by saying, that it was one of the rediscovery of the vital place of village economy in the making of a new India. Therefore, the inherent vitality of the village tradition and the work of Mahatma Gandhi combined and came to the rescue of the millions in the villages in their desperate struggle against annihilation by external forces, the nature and significance of which they understood little or nothing. As a result, the villages can to-day no longer be ignored. No party or group or Government, which ignores the villages, has a future in India.

Nearly 80 per cent of the people still live in the villages. The villages in undivided India numbered more than seven hundred thousand. Only about 20 per cent of the population is contained in a few hundred towns and cities. There is no conceivable plan under which the majority of the people can be brought into the cities. A few more millions may come into the towns in the next thirty to fifty years under the stress of the new circumstances in the country. But even so for a very long time to come, in fact as far as one can foresee, the vast majority of the people will continue to live in the villages. The village problem is thus the problem of the vast majority of the people and therefore the most important problem. What affects the life, work, prosperity and happiness of

the village people is what will affect the future of India more than anything else.

In regard to the villages, a very ancient conception is becoming very modern. This is the conception of village self-government as the basis of National Freedom and of village self-sufficiency as the basis of National Prosperity. The old village panchayat represented self-government and self-sufficiency in the villages. After wandering away from this basic reality of social organization in India for some centuries, we are coming back to it, driven by the compelling force of the fundamental facts and needs of India. Under British rule, village self-sufficiency became the chief obstacle to exploitation and was therefore sought to be broken at any cost. Equally village self-government embodied in the panchayats became the enemy of the highly centralized political and administrative machinery set up by the British. It was also therefore considerably broken. But now that India is free, these two basic factors in national reconstruction are coming to the fore again.

It is necessary to look very briefly into what was really happening to the villages under British rule. The villages produced the raw materials like cotton, jute, oil-seeds, cured leather and a variety of other things. The British manufacturers required these and they set up an elaborate and centralized administrative machinery to bring political authority to bear powerfully in favour of the process of exploitation. Raw materials were purchased at terms always favourable to the purchaser. The raw materials were then taken out of the country and made into finished goods. These came back to the country and were sold to the people always again at terms favourable to the seller. Due to language and other difficulties, an army of middlemen grew up and these made their profits, not at the cost of the British manufacturers or merchants but always at the cost of the primary producer of raw materials. In the process of buying and removing raw materials and bringing in and selling finished products, the British encountered a fresh difficulty in that the village craftsmen continued to produce and distribute a variety of articles in spite of all the competition organized by the former. Therefore, the next thing to do was to destroy village industries and this was done ruthlessly, as even some British historians have testified. The most tragic thing, however, was that the producer of raw materials in the villages also fell a prey to payment in ready cash by the exploiters and were thus willing to sell out, without reckoning on what would be the consequences to the whole of village economy under which life still went on in the villages. Thus, a totally ruinous and false economy arose in which money value played a dominant part and which started the ruination of villages. It took a long time for those concerned to discover into what a trap they had walked.

It was only some fifty years ago that the Swadeshi Movement arose in India under the inspiration of which people began to understand the evil consequences of the new economies of British Imperialism. It began to dawn on the people that to sell out raw

materials and take back finished goods from outside was like killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. India suddenly discovered in the cult of Swadeshi the answer to imperialistic exploitation. People realized once more that it was necessary to conserve all the raw materials that the country needed and to convert them into consumer goods within the country itself to give employment and profits to themselves. Thus alone could enough wealth rotate inside the country, without leakage to other countries. Around the new Swadeshi Movement rallied political and cultural idealism. The Swadeshi cult became a new religion with the people for a period.

But even under the Swadeshi Movement, the towns continued to dominate and exploit the villages. Raw materials were taken out of the villages to the factories in the town and manufactured goods from the towns went flooding back into the villages. Thus under the Swadeshi Movement also village craftmen found themselves ignored and ruined. Take for instance, the textile industry. Mills sprang up in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, etc., and the Swadeshi impulse was satisfied when cotton grown in the villages became cloth in the mills and returned to the villages to clothe the rural population. No one doubted for a moment that, what was happening was anything except what was patriotic and good for the country. What had happened was undoubtedly an improvement in that raw materials remained in the country and were converted into consumer goods giving employment and profits to the people of the country. But the villagers faced even a more complete ruin under the Swadeshi cult than even under British capitalism. The British did not understand the villages and could therefore exploit them only up to a point. Swadeshi capitalism knew villages better and could penetrate into them more deeply and thus exploit them more thoroughly. It was only with the coming of Mahatma Gandhi that a new and a more revolutionary meaning was given to the Swadeshi Movement. Gandhiji with his unerring instinct saw that the ruination of the villages was continuing under the Swadeshi Movement. He therefore insisted that any true cult of Swadeshi must be in terms of the millions in the villages. He offered a new definition of Swadeshi. Swadeshi was the revival and improvement of village industries, under which the birthright of the people of the villages to give themselves profitable employment by using local raw materials, resources and talents would be fully recognized. Under it, the productive work in villages by villagers and for villagers would not be ruined by foreign or even Indian capitalism. If the villages perished, India would perish and therefore everything should be done to preserve and strengthen the political and economic basis of the villages. Gandhiji took hold of the political opportunity in the freedom movements which he led, to direct the mind and will of the people towards this new precept and practice of Swadeshi. The new Swadeshi Movement under Gandhi, therefore, became nothing less than the New Life Movement for the villages. He not only expounded the idea but showed how it could be practised on a

nation-wide scale in the day-to-day life of the people. The various programmes he formulated from time to time as the Freedom Movements grew from strength to strength are included within the compass of, what is now well known as, the Constructive Programme. Under the impetus so created and sustained, all national reconstruction became primarily village reconstruction. At this point, it is necessary to mention that this movement for rebuilding the villages was not one of going back on history. It was not an attempt merely to revive the past. While on the one hand it did attempt to preserve what was vital in the village tradition, it equally on the other hand brought to bear on the whole problem the modern scientific outlook, calling for improvement in every direction. Only, improvements should be of the village and for the village. In other words, villages should remain villages and yet grow in prosperity and well-being. If modern industrialization and urbanization goes on in India as at present, it is bound to shatter village economy and break up the village tradition creating baffling problems without offering a solution for any of them. If the vast majority of the people get uprooted, what will happen? Gandhi faced up to these issues and offered the Constructive Programme as the way out. Towns and cities must change their character as the exploiters of villages. Instead of the village tradition and pattern changing and giving way before the towns and cities, the latter should re-adjust themselves as the servants of the villages. There is no question of turning away from all industrialization. The question, however, is what is the type, pattern and limits of industrialization, if it is not completely to uproot Indian humanity from the villages? Industrialists and national planners must answer this question, unless they wish to be accused of a new superstition worse than all the old superstitions in India. Gandhi challenged the British rulers and their supporters in India with this question. What is the economic and social programme for India which will strengthen the foundations of life in the villages, and yet keep India marching with the rest of the world in truly raising the standard of life of the masses? Gandhi furnished the answer in and through the Constructive Programme. He did not live to complete the programme. He has, however, indicated the way and we have to take to it and carry it forward by further experiments in the direction he showed. The position therefore is this: India is a vast country, almost a sub-continent. We have more people comparatively living in the space, that is, India than in an equal space anywhere else in the world, except perhaps in China. We have a very ancient history and therefore very powerful traditions in the lives of the common people. These traditions have stood the test of time more often than not. We must, therefore, reckon with the continuity and vitality of the traditions. The most powerful of all the traditions is the village tradition and the most continuous of all institutions is the village institution. We cannot break up this tradition and this institution, even if it were the right thing to do, and it is certainly not the right thing to do, in the light of the experience of centuries. To break up the village tradition is to uproot more than three hundred millions of people

from the village soil. It is not only most unreasonable but also the most dangerous thing to attempt. For, have we not seen in recent years the tragic and disastrous consequences of uprooting even a fraction of the people from their traditional background, which has thrown up the baffling problem of the refugees? It is the business of all concerned to solve existing problems and not to create fresh ones which no one can conceivably solve. This is not a plea against any change or modification in the ancient social systems of India. On the contrary, nothing is more needed to-day than far-reaching and even radical changes in many directions. The caste system with the menace of untouchability has to go and must go. Many of the feudal characteristics in the old order must be totally abolished. These are only illustrations. But we must destroy nothing which will weaken the basic vitality of the village system. We must not destroy anything we cannot replace with something better. We must take the village and plan to keep it as a village and yet improve it in the light of the progress and freedom of mankind.

Let us, therefore, approach the village with care and reverence, care for the human mind which has clung to rural life as to an everlasting mother and reverence for the traditions which made life vital and continuous in the village homes through the centuries. We must understand, before we do anything in the village, something of the eternal values the village tradition has created and cherished against the onslaught of outside forces during many hundreds of years. Let us walk carefully as we pick our way over the village soil. Every inch is sacred ground and every thought you come across has a history behind it. We have to go to the villages to fulfil and not to destroy what is vital in the villages. Even where a radical change is necessary, let us effect the change in a spirit of understanding and respect. Let us take no ready-made solutions with us. Let us first look at the village and know it for what it was and what it is. Let us study not only the material data but the mental data of every village before we put out our hands to change or alter anything. Let us above all not walk into the village with the town mind. Let us ourselves become village-minded before we take up village work. Thus alone can we know what has to be changed and exactly where and how. And when we initiate changes, it must not be as though someone from outside is doing it. Nothing can be changed really in the village, unless we carry the villagers with us in the process. In other words, material changes must only follow mental changes. Mental changes anywhere are not brought about easily, much less in the strong traditional ground of the village. There is no short cut in village work. Too much hurry will be less speed in the villages. All work must inevitably be educational work in substance and in method. Which of us then can do this work in the right way? What is the training we ourselves must undergo to prepare ourselves for this dedication to the service of humanity in the villages? These are questions which we must try to answer as we go on with this study in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLAGE AND ITS PROBLEMS.

There are many problems in a village and these must be studied carefully. But the village itself is a problem and this also has to be studied carefully. The villages are there; seven lakhs of them in India and Pakistan. India's present share will be between 4 and 5 lakhs of villages. They are there and yet life, prosperity and happiness are ebbing away from them. The migration from villages to towns is steadily going on. But the towns are few compared to the villages and the drain of material and human resources is not easily perceived against the vast background of humanity in the villages. The few hundred towns are steadily growing and year after year more people are coming into the towns. But can our towns absorb the vast village population? In other words, the towns which contain only about 20 per cent of the population will find it a tremendous problem, if the remaining 80 per cent in the villages were to come in. As the towns grow in size and in numbers, a few more millions may be absorbed in them, but many more millions will still remain in the villages. This is where India differs from European and American countries. These countries have less density of population. India is only a little less than two-thirds of the U.S.A. in extent and yet the population in India is double that of the U.S.A. The disparity is much greater as between India and Canada or Australia. In England and the U.S.A., the majority of the people live in cities. Such a state is difficult or even impossible in India for a long time to come, even if it were desirable. The great problem therefore is that the villages will remain, not as centres of prosperity or happiness or freedom but in a condition of ever-increasing poverty, unhappiness and slavery. This is how the village has become a problem. It is the most difficult problem facing those who wish to reconstruct Indian society on a better basis. The problem has to be squarely faced, if life in India is not to perish at the very root. If the villages continue to remain in their present position, then the poverty, ignorance, insanitation, diseases and all the other horrible conditions in the villages will practically infect the whole nation and paralyse its very existence. Let no one therefore run away from this problem under any pretext whatsoever. The rules, the officials, the capitalists, the revolutionaries, the peasants, the labourers in fact everybody and every group is affected by the tragedy of the position in the villages. Why not then face it squarely and understand it properly?

What is the Indian village like to-day? Anyone can see it. It is an open book. If you enter a village, the first thing that strikes you is the horrible state of insanitation. The paths leading to the village and the paths leading out of it, are often the open public latrines of the village. All empty spaces in and around the village serve the same purpose. You can hardly step in or out of a

village without treading on filth of every kind. The drinking water in wells and the water in tanks, streams and rivers are all polluted by the conditions of insanitation. There are no good roads at all. What are called village roads are simply mud and slush and ruts, very narrow and difficult throughout the year. During the rains, however, even the bullock-carts or the hardy jeeps will find it impossible to negotiate them. In many places the villages are cut away from each other and from the rest of the country during the rainy season. The American expert Dr. A. E. Morgan, said it would cost an impossible pile of money to build all the roads to connect the villages with each other and the country as a whole. Thus even before you are actually inside the village, this problem of communications will be there to face.

Take the houses in the villages. The majority are one-room mud-huts with barely a thatched roof. Such facilities as separate kitchens or bath-rooms or living rooms are unknown except in very rare cases. The floors are also made of mud. There are no windows and most often only one door. Cattle and men live together, each adding to the filth of the other. The wells very often lack parapets or pulleys and are just holes in the earth. Every one who draws water will also wash down a little water and dirt mixed together back into the well. The tanks are worse. Their bunds are public latrines because the water is near for washing after answering the calls of nature. Streams and rivers have all their banks polluted in the same manner. Think of the life of a people without even clean drinking water! Even the surroundings of the village temples are desecrated in this way.

And yet astonishingly, villagers have excellent standards of personal and individual cleanliness. They bathe once a day and wash their mouths regularly. Washing clothes at least once a day is also part of the daily routine. The immediate surroundings of the houses will be clean. The vessels and pots and pans will be bright and well-kept. Individual and personal cleanliness are part of the religion of the people, but all cleanliness ends with the individual and the immediate surroundings of the village home. Where collective life begins, uncleanliness too begins. Collective insanitation and collective life almost appear like inter-changeable data in the villages. Naturally, in the wake of insanitation come disease and death. People have a false idea that the villages have fresh air and plenty of sunshine and water and so life is healthier in them. The truth, however, is that pure drinking water is difficult to get in the villages and even any drinking water for the matter of that. Insanitation fouls the air. Bad housing adds to the difficulties. There are thus more diseases in the villages and more people suffer from them than in the towns and no one to prevent or cure them.

Poverty is, of course, everywhere. The old system of cheap irrigation for farms and fields has fallen into disrepair. Old tanks have dried or got levelled up by sand and mud washed into them during the rainy seasons of many decades. There are no new

irrigation projects except on a very big scale and in far away places. Agriculture yield has gone down invariably. Even the land under cultivation has shrunk and almost all village handicrafts have been killed in the cruel competition with cheap tinsels of all kinds from the outside world. The few village industries that still linger like the handloom or village pottery are facing a slow death. All clever people have run away from the villages. Those left behind are less clever and enterprising. Thus, the human brain has also faced a process of attenuation in the villages. Poverty, therefore, holds the sway. When poverty grew and enterprise fled, ignorance increased. There was no stimulus left for village education and education itself got concentrated in the towns. When poverty and ignorance thus joined in unholy wedlock, the progeny became a brood of many evils. Even the temples began to decay and the Gods themselves were on the verge of migration to the towns. How has all this wreckage come about? In what way did the once fairly self-contained, self-sufficient, prosperous and healthy villages which were the seats of an ancient culture, come to this plight?

The two pillars on which the prosperity and happiness in the villages rested were agriculture and agro-industries. Under British rule, exploitation first struck at the agro-industries. Agro-industries are village industries. Village industries once represented a full circle of handicrafts including every item needed for the life of the people in the villages. The carpenter, the weaver, the blacksmith, the potter, the leather worker, the gur maker, the oil presser and others completed the circle of village industries. Such a circle of economy existed in villages individually or in groups of them. There was, of course, no cent per cent self-sufficiency. But a large measure of self-sufficiency and an adequate measure of healthy, mutual dependence existed. Self-sufficiency was primarily in regard to food, clothing and housing. Artistic and luxury articles were inter-changed without harm to anybody. The level of village life was never very high and never too low. The level was generally a middle one of prosperity and happiness

When exploitation under British rule reached the villages, the first blow was struck at the cloth industry Spinning was universal and the handlooms were spread out over every province and district. Even to-day, it is significant that, some of the best hand-weaving in India is in areas which are the least advanced in the modern industrial sense. Orissa, for instance, has the most artistic and complex weaving in India. Handloom weavers in Orissa can weave patterns like a painter painting pictures and designs. How and why did the first attack come on the cloth industry? Primarily because the British wanted to obtain Indian cotton. They wanted not only the cotton for making cloth in the mills in their own country but they also wanted markets for the same cloth in the country from which they took away the cotton In the course of what followed, hand-spinning nearly died out and hand-weaving suffered grievously. The same thing happened slowly and step by step in the case of the other village industries.

The blacksmiths, the metal workers, the leather makers, the oil pressers and others met the same fate in the course of many decades in a lesser or greater degree. Even to-day, there are innumerable places in India where the tradition of very high skill in many crafts still persists. Articles made of highly flexible steel, metal lamps and vessels of the highest artistry, articles in bronze and in various cast metals of rare beauty are all still obtainable from handicraftsmen who have not yet perished completely. The British and others imported cheap goods of every description from their factories engaged in mass production, with the result that goods coming from thousands of miles away sold cheaper than local goods. There was not only no protection against such disastrous competition as in free countries, but on the other hand, organized encouragement was given to such competition. The village artisans thus found their work slowly slipping away from their hands as the years passed and never knew fully why it was happening. Every village industry was thus defeated and ruined step by step. The rulers and their officials preferred foreign products of all kinds and thus set the pattern for the new fashion. Educated Indians imitated the rulers and the officials because their interest lay in winning the favour of the latter. The middle classes followed suit and even the poorer classes came into line with what was happening. Village industries thus went to the wall.

When Agro-industries thus perished or weakened, the prosperity of the villages depended more and more on agriculture alone. Thus one pillar began increasingly to bear the weight till then borne by two pillars. It was like a man starting to live on one lung only. In the long run tragic consequences ensued. More and more skilled workers ran away to the towns and mortgaged themselves to the exploiters on the latter's own terms. Only less clever and efficient human material lingered in the villages. Then again, the pressure of life on the land increased as more and more families fell back on land as their sole support. More was taken out of the land than was given back to it. The soil itself thus weakened and in the general despair caused by growing poverty even the old habits of hard and good work were slowly given up. The vicious circle leading to weakness and decay, which in turn made exploitation more and more easy thus took possession of the villages. The village farmer, who toiled hard on the land and raised food and other crops, went to the towns nearby to buy the cheaper cloth, cheaper tools and cheaper articles imported from abroad. Thus the farmer unconsciously struck a blow at the work of his own village craftsmen. The handloom weaver would not buy the handspun yarn in the villages and turned to the cheaper yarn from the mills. He too thus struck a blow at fellow-craftsmen. The same thing happened with the blacksmiths, metal workers, village potters and others. Each struck at the other in self-interest under the increasing pressure of exploitation from outside and thus weakened each other. In the final result, village economy broke up steadily and villages continued to exist sustaining life at a

low and miserable level. If anything has prevented the final ruin of the villages, it is the many sided tradition in production and distribution, which went hand in hand and which continued to linger with some kind of a deathless life in the villages. Even to-day in the shadow of the great textile mills, thousands of hand-loom weavers in many places ply their delicate and beautiful craft and somehow find a market for their goods and thus continue to hold on precariously to their traditional life. The same is true of our metal workers, oil pressers, village potters, etc. In other countries industrialization has mostly wiped out such crafts. In India on the contrary, very large numbers of these craftsmen are even now putting up a great and sustained fight against the heaviest odds, thanks to tradition and the habits of the people.

What then are the problems in villages? It has already been indicated that the most difficult problem is to let the villages remain as villages, and yet to improve them and vitalize them in the context of modern scientific progress. How can villagers remain villagers and yet make their lives fuller, happier and more prosperous? How can villages be made more sanitary and healthy, with education available to every child and with work for every artisan? How can village agriculture be improved to give larger yield? How can the spirit and methods of co-operation help in building up self-sufficiency and self-reliance?

In the villages, the average income is now perhaps about 4 annas per head per day, with living costs higher by more than 200 per cent. Literacy, not to speak of education, is only round about 15 per cent. Infant mortality and the death-rate, as also the incidence of terrible epidemics, are higher than in most other countries of the world. Some 60 to 70 lakhs of people die every year from preventible diseases arising largely from malnutrition and insanitation. How can we make a clean sweep of these evils to build up a better India, is the challenge to administrators, social workers in every field and to the people generally.

While resources are not fully utilized, production is low and the pressure on land is increasing, the population itself is growing at an alarming rate. Even in terms of simple arithmetic, we have to control the growth of population and to increase production, if India is not to be plunged into disaster. Added to the rapid growth of population, we have the problem of malnutrition on the widest scale. Food is scarce and even what food we have is unbalanced and lacking in nutrition. We even go to the amazing extent of reducing the nutritional values of what food we have by wrong processings like the mill-polishing of rice or the manufacture of Vanaspathi. Add to these difficulties the many superstitions in the minds of the people, like the one attributing the outbreak of epidemics to the displeasure of village deities and it is easy to understand something of the evils that encompass our villages and make the task of reconstruction so very difficult.

It is easy to talk and write about village improvements. When we simply write or speak, we are free to indulge in every kind of

plan. But the realities in the village to-day are such that all fancy schemes and programmes break down completely at their first touch. There are any number of books being written and articles published laying down such and such set patterns for village reconstruction. Most of these patterns crumble the moment you begin actual work in a village. Ready-made solutions are no solutions in the village. We should not attempt to improve villages by importing schemes and plans from outside. That will ruin local initiative without which village reconstruction will be unreal. Our task is the task of education. We may lay down certain general principles and indicate the lines of development. The villagers must work out their destiny themselves. We must guarantee protection from exploitation, the supply of technical and scientific assistance and the proper training of village workers in their own environment. Education in the widest sense must cover all our effort in the villages. What that education must be, we shall study in some of the ensuing chapters. Suffice it to say here, that such education also should not be something super-imposed from outside. It should evolve from inside and must bear close relation to the soil, facts and needs of the village.

Our tasks in the villages is therefore extremely delicate and difficult. It should seek to fulfil and not to destroy the material and mental resources, which lie embedded in the life and traditions of the villages.

CHAPTER III.

HOW GANDHIJI APPROACHED THE PROBLEM.

Attempts at village reconstruction were begun even before Gandhi came on the scene. We have referred to the Swadeshi Movement which arose in the wake of the Partition of Bengal. The waves of this movement did reach the villages. Political leaders tried to establish contact with the masses in the villages. It was however more a political approach and did not penetrate the life of the villages. Lokamanya Tilak in Maharashtra and the great Annie Beasant in South India and their followers also took the message of freedom to the villages. Here again, the approach was less a life approach than a political approach. The masses in the villages were stirred up a bit but their daily life of poverty and suffering continued without any change. These movements however were the fore-runners of the Gandhi Movement which latter swept the country.

Gandhiji's earliest experience of village life in India were in Bihar and in Gujarat. He was deeply moved by the cry of agony which reached him from the peasants and he plunged himself into a study of their living conditions and later into non-violent struggles to redeem them from their bondage. He thus came face

to face with the realities of village life in India, not like a reformer from without, but like a fellow-sufferer and comrade who saw from within what was happening. Thus he looked into the very heart of the Indian problem. He found that the land was good, the climate easy and the peasant himself hardy and frugal. Why then was the village poor? Why did not the villager understand anything of the alien forces crushing his life into the dust? This was more than thirty years ago. Since then, during all the years that followed Gandhiji kept his eyes on the village and his ears close down to the village earth. He travelled about incessantly throughout India and perhaps no man has travelled more often up and down our vast country nor met more millions of people face to face than he did. He did not look at the cities only. He studied the villages in Bihar, in Gujarat, in Tamilnad, in Andhra, in Orissa and in Punjab, etc. The more he studied the life of the people, the more he was astonished and wounded by their poverty, ignorance and suffering. The British had gone on ruling India for one hundred and fifty years! The British were enlightened and able rulers! In their own country they were a free, disciplined prosperous, happy and powerful people. Who could have been better rulers? And yet, why was the life of the people ebbing away from the lakhs of villages where they lived? Why was the lamp of life burning so low in the homes of the people? It was as he studied this phenomenon that, he realised how behind a facade of efficient and apparently just administration, there was going on all the time a process of exploitation, ruthless, silent and all-pervading. He had always been a friend of the British and right up to 1919 he had even given moral support to British rule in India, trusting that the destiny of his country would be fulfilled within the British Empire. It was not the political evil of British rule that staggered him as he studied the poverty and sufferings of the people; it was even more the mental and moral ruin of the people which steadily incapacitated them to work even for their own redemption. He realised the extreme urgency of the situation in India and plunged himself into a mighty movement for strengthening the people's will to redeem themselves. The movement was not made by Gandhi, however great the power of his personality and character was. It was the history of India which made the movement. The greatness of Gandhi primarily consisted in that he realised the significance and proportions of the movement that was rising and deliberately made himself into the instrument of the historic process in India.

Gandhi analysed the Indian situation as he found it. Here is a glimpse into that analysis. The Gandhian analysis has to be understood, if the life and work of Gandhi and, what is more, the meaning and value of the Constructive Programme is to be understood.

Here is India, where the overwhelming majority of the people have lived for a thousand years and more in village communities and where for a very long time yet to come they must continue

to be. Some 80 per cent of the people are thus the permanent citizens of many thousands of villages. Only about 20 per cent of the people are in a few hundred towns and cities. The British were exploiting the people with all their political power and organizational ability and the educated community in the towns was abetting in the crime. There was an external glitter of power and plenty. But inside, life had become empty and hollow. A minority was fattening on the masses of the people. The millions in the villages had become dirty, poor, ignorant and disease-ridden and what was more tragic, their own power of will to save themselves was breaking down under the strain. The poverty of India began and grew with the growth of British exploitation. That exploitation consisted principally in gathering up most of the raw materials produced in the country, on terms most favourable to the exploiter, and in bringing back for sale manufactured articles, again on terms wholly advantageous to the exploiter. Under the strain of such exploitation, one lung of the country, namely, agro-industries, had caught the consumption of decay. The country was therefore living only on one lung, namely, agriculture. Since the life of the whole country was being sustained on this one lung of agriculture that too was slowly breaking down under the double strain. Politics, in the ordinary sense, appeared a very small remedy for the collossal tragedy of the slow death of a nation at its very roots. What was needed at once and on a nation-wide scale was to challenge exploitation and arrest decay. Talking, lecturing and writing politics was no remedy at all. The British rulers themselves being the direct promoters of exploitation, it was in vain to appeal to them for help against themselves. The educated sections of the people were also drawn into the process of exploitation and were its beneficiaries. Only a few of the idealists and revolutionaries among them were willing to revolt. The mass of the people were broken down but not finally conquered, mentally or materially, on the village soil and moreover they were the real sufferers. Their eyes must first be opened and their will strengthened. Gandhi also saw the inadequacy of the Swadeshi Movement to reach down to the roots of the life of the people. And yet, it was exactly that very life, which had to be watered at its roots in the villages, to bring back fresh life to the Nation. Gandhi took up one or two immediate struggles for justice for peasants in Champaran and in Borsad. He succeeded in a measure but found out that such isolated skirmishes would be no remedy for an evil of such vast proportions. These experiments helped Gandhi however to develop the technic of mass non-violent action on the one hand and of the Constructive Programme on the other. It will thus be seen that the Constructive Programme was born in the heart of a revolution and thus inevitably shared in its revolutionary character.

The Constructive Programme was not conceived or formulated mechanically at one point of time or action. It grew from point to point, from need to need and challenge to challenge, basing itself fundamentally on the idea that the people must work out their own

Shrinebasar 29.10.71

redemption by themselves and for themselves. In other words, no one was going to help the people except their own awakened minds and the realisation by themselves of the extreme urgency of the situation. The Constructive Programme was therefore from the very start a programme of the people by the people and for the people. It was a programme of the organised and collective forces of construction against the organised and collective forces of destruction. The starting point is thus one of self-reliance. Next came the idea that, no one should wait for anything from outside, to do what was necessary here and now. Every one was to use his or her own hands, get hold of the nearest materials and tools and make something which will be of use in the daily life of the village and which will give work to those who were without it. Let no one wait for distant raw materials, for difficult technical training or for far-away plans. At every stage the British rulers and their supporters in India would intervene against the people to keep them in subjection. But the hands of the people were their own, the raw materials were close at hand, the ancient skill in the fingers was not dead and inaction meant death. Therefore let every one use his hands, the raw materials available and re-exercise their skills. This was the new and dynamic meaning of Gandhi's Swadeshi. Gandhi not only expounded the idea but infected the millions with the urgency to act and himself set the example of working out the idea in every detail. The Hindusthani Language Movement, the Khadi and Village Industries Programmes, the Harijan Emancipation Work, the Basic Education Plan and later the Kasturba Trust Movement, etc., all came out of the urgency of the situation and the need to utilise all available resources and materials without waiting for perfect schemes or instruments or training. These would come later and did come later. The Constructive Programme thus had its roots, on the one hand, in the hard facts of India and on the other, its branches reached out to the many urgent needs of India. Any one who scrutinises the Constructive Programme for perfect details will be disappointed. What it contains is the deep and insistent urge of the life and history of India, to deal with vast problems, here and now, in a spirit of faith and courage and along clear and specific lines. The programme itself, once started in the spirit of self-analysis and self-reliance, will discover more and more, its own strength and the details of day-to-day action.

The Khadi Movement came first. Along with it also came the movement for the Hindustani language as the National language of India. Then came the All-India Village Industries Movement and the Harijan Sevak Sangh. A little later came the movement for Educational Reconstruction through the Hindustani Talimi Sangh. This was followed by the Kasturba Trust Movement for the training of women workers for work among women and children in the villages. The Go Seva Sangh was established to conserve and improve the cattle wealth of the country, and to this was added the programme for improved agriculture. As these

different movements of the Constructive Programme spread out in the country and grew in strength, numerous independent institutions also sprang up to carry out one or more items of the constructive programme. Through the all-India organizations built up directly by Gandhi and his immediate co-workers and through these independent institutions the work of National Reconstruction spread and grew. Its message was not a political message only or an economic one only. It was the message of a complete new life for the people. We have heard of the New Life Movement in China. In India, the Constructive Programme became nothing less than a New Life Movement of the people.

This then was the approach of Gandhi to the village problem. That approach is embodied in the Constructive Programme. It is explained in terms of self-reliance and the maximum possible self-sufficiency. Its aim was to revitalise village life at every point, taking the village as a whole with all its strength and weakness, with all its possibilities and limitations and with all its material and mental resources. Gandhi knew that the people were thirsting for political freedom and, therefore, harnessed all the forces of patriotic fervour in and through the Constructive Programme, defining Freedom itself as the fulfilment of the Constructive Programme. He thus canalised all the forces thirsting for freedom to build up that freedom from the bottom upwards and in terms of the liberation and service of the millions in the village. This was a great and wonderful thing to do. India listened to Gandhi. India followed Gandhi. The Constructive Programme grew into a reality in the life of the people. It strengthened, as nothing else, the will and unity of the people, not only to throw away political but also economic, social and cultural slavery. The Gandhian approach was thus an all-embracing life approach.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME.

We have seen how the Constructive Programme was born and grew up in response to the facts and the needs of India. Mahatma Gandhi embodied in himself the challenge that came from those facts and needs of India. That his dynamic personality and character coloured and shaped the Constructive Programme giving it an irresistable impetus, is also undoubtedly true. It will be a mistake, however, to consider the Constructive Programme, as having come out of the brain and heart of only one man, however great. The more we study the Constructive Programme, the more we shall realize that the personal element of Gandhi was only second to that of the mighty impersonal element of history in the making of it. The Constructive Programme was and is a historic

necessity in India. There is a process of history with its roots in the past, which gathers its momentum from the present and then lays hold upon the lives of a people, driving them irresistably in a certain direction. Objective forces of history furnish the compelling motive even more than the power of personality in leadership. How and when exactly the historic process will take hold of the lives of a people no one can precisely foresee. But sometime or other, may be in the fullness of time, a deep stirring comes in the life of the people and they are then plucked up and driven forward by compelling forces in a certain direction. The Constructive Programme represents at a critical time the driving urge of the historic process in India.

Something of the nature of that crisis has been indicated already. The crisis was not merely political or economic. It was a total life crisis. It was a crisis in which the major question was, whether more than three hundred millions of people were to live or perish. But how can so many millions of human beings with an ancient history and who had produced imperishable values of culture, perish from the face of the earth? They had suffered and faced slow death. Such suffering, when accumulated, can suddenly generate tremendous power. Do we not know how, beyond a certain stage, all suppression creates suddenly an unaccountable resurgence of power in the oppressed? Millions of men and women in India living in the villages had endured everything that any people can ever endure. They had to find a way out or perish. Their sufferings were like the waters trapped behind a dam seeking an outlet somewhere, somehow. Under Gandhi, India's millions re-discovered the power of their will, and made a breach in the wall of slavery. The result was a great uprising of the people under the leadership of Gandhi. It was this irresistable upsurge of the life of the Indian people which suddenly found expression and embodiment in Mahatma Gandhi. Someone had to embody that upward surge. If it was not Mahatma Gandhi it would have been someone else. The greatness of Gandhi was that he saw the meaning and the power of that surge and absorbed it into himself. Thus it was not Gandhi who made the Constructive Programme, but the Constructive Programme that made Gandhi the man of destiny in India.

Let there be then this objective approach to the Constructive Programme. It has its roots in the basic facts of India and its branches reach out to meet the basic needs of India. Gandhi was only an instrument, albeit a mighty and a radiant one, of this historic process. It is only when a great idea and a great man or woman combine that something of revolutionary and far-reaching consequence happens in the world. Without the man or the woman the idea waits in the womb of history and without the idea the person becomes merely a demagogue or a charlatan. In the Constructive Programme a mighty idea found the man and a mighty man found the idea and combined in a movement of unparalleled significance and proportions.

Let us study briefly the basic facts in which are the roots of the Constructive Programme. These facts are poverty, ignorance, insanitation and diseases and the cultural and spiritual decay of an ancient people, who once set the patterns for the material and cultural progress of the world.

The poverty of the people in the villages was and is indescribable. A couple of annas can stand between life and death in a village. Some forty years ago the average national income per head per day was reckoned as two annas. We are told the average income is round about four annas to-day. Even so, living costs have more than doubled, with the result that, even if it is true that the average daily national income per head has increased, it has not increased enough even to cover the rise in living costs. Poverty has thus deepened. These figures on paper can hardly ever give any adequate idea of the poverty in the villages. Particularly now, when a good famine has appeared on the horizon and the cost of everything is going up steadily, the poverty of the people appears in naked relief. Congress Governments at the Centre and in the States are doing what they can, but what is being done is not adequate. The deepening crisis will make it imperative for the people and Governments to take up the Constructive Programme more earnestly than ever before.

Allied to poverty and in a measure because of it is the appalling illiteracy and ignorance of the large masses of the people in the villages. After a hundred and fifty years of British rule the people were left with only about 12 per cent of literacy. Education was much less, perhaps one or two per cent. Even to-day nearly 80 per cent of the people cannot read and write their own names. The crores of rupees spent on Universities, colleges and schools have hardly touched the fringe of the problem. On the one hand is the illiteracy and ignorance of the people and on the other, a system of education so costly that it can never become universal. India has not discarded that system even under political freedom. Men and women in the villages even to-day walk long distances to get a letter written or read to them. How can a people, the vast majority of whom are illiterate and ignorant rise to their full height in the modern world?

With poverty wedded to ignorance the result is insanitation, mal-nutrition, disease and death spreading in the villages. How can a people who are hungry and ignorant live cleanly? Insanitation is the curse of life in the villages. Insanitation and mal-nutrition have lowered the health of the people in the villages to the breaking point. As a result there are widespread outbreaks of epidemics and other diseases, recurring regularly year after year. It has been roughly computed that six to eight million people die every year from diseases due to mal-nutrition and insanitation. Tuberculosis alone accounts for over five lakhs of deaths annually. The other common disease are malaria, cholera, smallpox, plague,

typhoid, etc. Leprosy also is widely rampant. How can a people prosper and grow in greatness with such a devastating low-level of health.

The British also initiated a cultural conquest of India through the English language and literature. English became the language of the educated, and no one was a cultured man or woman unless he or she was steeped in English literature and thought. The educated community thus became aliens in their own country because English education was beyond the reach of the vast majority of the people in the villages. These millions in the villages did not have the benefit of the old cheap universal system of rural culture nor of the new English system. It was only in the last fifty years that, along with the political movement for freedom came also the movement for re-emphasising the importance of the languages and the culture of India. The cultural conquest of India appeared at one time almost complete. Then came the renaissance which took the people back to the fountains of their own cultural and spiritual traditions.

This then is a brief picture of the basic facts from which the Constructive Programme inevitably arose. And when it did arise, it had to deal with these facts and offer solutions for the many ills which came out of them. That is why the Constructive Programme had inevitably to offer solutions and to show the way out. If complete solutions have not been offered for all problems and if even where solutions were offered and methods indicated, they have not been worked fully, it is because the Constructive Programme is all the time growing and evolving. Equally, to the extent the Constructive Programme has been worked earnestly, it has corrected the evil situation at many points and shown the way for an over-all and comprehensive solution. We shall now study very briefly, how the Constructive Programme has been able to achieve this.

The Constructive Programme, it has often been claimed, is a revolutionary programme and not merely a programme of relief measures. Relief work of every kind is itself good and even if the Constructive Programme is so judged and not found wanting, it will still be a great programme. Many of the concrete schemes of work inside the Constructive Programme are undoubtedly relief works. But the Constructive Programme itself was conceived, planned and worked as a revolutionary programme. After all, what are the basic characteristics of a revolution? People imagine that violence and blood-shed must characterise every revolution. This is a stupid idea. Undoubtedly many revolutions have been violent and bloody. But the greatest revolutions in history have been revolutions of love and peace and not of hate and violence. The French, the American, the Russian, the Chinese and other revolutions are small compared to the world sweeping revolutions which came from the wisdom of the Greek Philosophers, the Indian Rishis, from a Buddha or a Christ or a Mohamud. These revolutions changed the character and mind of men for all time and originated fresh epochs of civilization and culture. The

difference between what are only political revolutions and the revolutions in the whole of life initiated by the wisdom and vision of the great prophets, is not that the one is a revolution and the other a moral transformation or reform merely. On the contrary, every revolution must also be a moral transformation. Even political revolution is valid only to the extent that, it brings about a moral transformation in the character of human society.

What then are the inescapable features of a real revolution? There is first the element of compelling urgency in every revolution. No revolution can be slow or hesitant. Secondly, the whole of action in a revolution is swift and moves forward with a rush. Thirdly, the changes involved in a revolution are fundamental and radical. Fourthly, all changes are directed to the creation of a new social order, which guarantees to the people a freer, fuller, richer and happier life. The Constructive Programme, which took its birth in the heart of a political and cultural revolution, possessed these characteristics as it swiftly took shape and spread over the country. We have seen how Gandhi wanted to take action here and now without brooking the slightest delay. He wanted a whole people to re-discover the power of their will to act together and at once for the total welfare of all. He told the British Judge, who sentenced him to six years imprisonment in 1921, that he certainly knew he was playing with fire in rousing up the people but that if he were let off he would certainly play with that fire again. A sense of extreme urgency therefore characterised the programme from the very start. Did not Gandhi say that, he wanted the Constructive Programme to be worked with the regularity of a clock and the speed of the Punjab Mail? The Constructive Programme asked also for radical changes in the entire life of the people. The people were to look to themselves to discover their strength and not to any outside power or agency. The mighty British Government was to be completely ignored. The people were to act as though they were already free. They were to produce what they needed straightaway with local materials, resources and talents. The Khadi and the Village Industries programmes showed the way in this regard. The people must cast away the spell of the language of the rulers and build up a common National Language. That was the genesis of the Hindusthani Prachar Sabha. People were to search their hearts and purify themselves and destroy the slavery inside their own land and society. So came the Harijan Sevak Sangh for the emancipation of the "untouchables". People were to educate themselves through life and for life; education should become work-centred and not book-centred and never depend upon the alien Government. That was Basic Education, and the organization created to promote it was the Hindustani Talimi Sangh. The women must be trained and organized to help in rebuilding the villages and therefore the Kasturba National Memorial Trust was started. Thus one after the other, came the great All-India organizations of constructive work. The people must build up their life on self-reliance and self-sufficiency. That was the programme of Samagra Grama Seva,

i.e., All-round Village Reconstruction. Gandhi did not merely formulate the programme. He took it up himself and induced the millions to take it up with him. He toured India without respite or rest. On occasions he addressed four and five mass meetings a day, talking straight to more than a hundred thousand people in twenty-four hours. He wrote in "Young India" and later in "Harijan" and what he wrote was translated into every Indian language, so that literally millions of people read them or heard them read. More than speaking and writing he organized; more than organizing, he himself led the way in doing all that he asked others to do. Such ceaseless activity appeared outwardly to be on the political plane, but inside, it was the re-expression of the mind and soul of a great people in terms of day-to-day work. Such work was interrupted a little or a little weakened for a time only when, the British cast him and thousands of his co-workers into prisons. But Gandhi had a way of becoming more powerful from inside the prisons. Every time Gandhi was thrown into prison the people took another step forward to justify him. The Constructive Programme was the one stabilizing and vitalizing factor continually behind the political programme. The political programme appeared on a bigger canvas externally, its strength however came from the Constructive Programme. This went on till India became free three years ago.

The Constructive Programme was however not for winning political independence only. It was intended by history and by Gandhi to set the pattern for freedom in India. In other words, while it helped in winning the freedom of the country, it showed also how that freedom was to be nurtured and built up. The task of the Constructive Programme therefore still remains unfulfilled. The challenge to-day to all those engaged in the Constructive Programme is to fulfil it under the new conditions created by political freedom. Has the task become easier or more difficult? Ordinarily, it should have become easier. But one cannot reckon with things for a certainty in politics. Leaders of a political revolution, have more than once in history, turned back upon their own past and violated their solemn pledges. But whatever happens, the Constructive Programme will and must go on, readjusting itself without sacrificing its basis, to the new conditions created by political freedom, till that freedom becomes the undiluted freedom of the people in which the weakest has the same opportunity and status as the strongest.

It is time we studied something of the work and history of the great All-India Organizations of Constructive Work. Let us take first the All-India Spinners' Association. It is this association which took up the task of organizing the Khadi Movement, i.e., the movement for the promotion of hand-spinning and hand-weaving in the villages. Why did the Khadi Movement come first? The significance of the Khadi Movement lies in the fact that it took up the once prevalent universal village industry, i.e., hand-spinning and sought to revive it against the heaviest odds. Hand-spinning had nearly died out. Factory yarn had swamped the markets

and the country side. The handloom weavers themselves, first cousins of the hand-spinners, had given up hand-spun yarn and turned to mill yarn. Even the handlooms were in a precarious position. The British mills, the mills in India and in Japan were engaged in a fierce competition with each other to capture the trade and as a result, hand-spun and hand-woven cloth was almost completely thrown out of the picture. Even the common people had mentally turned away from Khadi. And yet in the Gandhian analysis the revival of the Khadi Movement became the first step in National Reconstruction. No one believed it could be done. Gandhi did not hesitate for a moment. He harnessed the resurgent political enthusiasm of the people to the cult of Khadi and made Khadi the symbol at once of the political and economic redemption of the villages. The Khadi idea caught the imagination of the people. The scope of Khadi was as extensive as the country itself. It could enter every home. It required little training. It wanted only a few rupees for capital. Every one could ply the spinning-wheel during hours which were otherwise wasted or misused. The work could be done right inside the home. It was part of domestic economy. The women and children could take up this work in their thousands and convert wasted time into national wealth. No other work in the home or the village would be dislocated. What was thus produced, namely, hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, could be consumed everywhere and by every one. The poor, the middle and even the intellectual classes were all caught up in the new idea and Khadi became almost universally popular. The first attack of the British exploiters had been on the cloth industry of India, i.e., on the spinning-wheel and the handlooms. Gandhi insisted that it was just at this point that the movement of liberation from exploitation must begin. This approach had a great psychological value and it was fully utilized. The charka or the spinning-wheel might appear to be a small thing, but when millions of people handle a small thing it can become a big thing. That was what happened. The Charka or Hand-spinning movement could not even be started without any army of workers turning their faces away from the towns to the villages, where the cotton grew and where the spinning-wheel still lingered. The Charka movement thus compelled a return to the village and to reality. The growth of the Khadi movement in India has hardly any parallel in the history of any country. Few people remember to-day, how riots broke out on an extensive scale in England and in Germany when the first textile mills were set up. It was the last fight of the handicrafts against industrialization. But the handicraftsmen in England and in Germany and elsewhere had not much backing or great leadership. Later, when the loot and the plunder from all over the East poured into these countries, all those who were earlier thrown out of employment were re-employed in the ever-increasing number of new factories. But if there were no empires and no loot and plunder from them, these old craftsmen and workers could never have been rehabilitated. In India conditions were very different. Conditions were

really ripe for a return to the handicrafts and there was Gandhi at the head of a mighty movement to support them. When Gandhi asked for taking the spinning-wheel back into its old place at the centre of village economy, he was asking for the exact reversal of the process by which the British got it out of the village. That was the historic and political importance behind the Khadi movement. The movement was important in itself for conserving the cotton wealth in the rural areas, for giving employment to an army of spinners and weavers and for putting a few more annas into the pockets of the villagers where there was none before. Khadi is even more important as the spearhead of the village movement in India. It was the symbol of a mental revolution leading on to a revolution in the habits of the people. Gandhi fired the people with the idea that Swaraj could be won at the point of the spindle.

The Charka movement had to pave the way for a fuller return to the village and this it did. Close on its heels came the All-India Village Industries movement. The organization that took up this new work was the All-India Village Industries Association. The object was to revive and strengthen all such village industries as really mattered to the life of the village community. The chakki, the ghani, pottery, carpentry, blacksmithy, metal-works, leather-works, cattle raising, composting of manure, improved agriculture, paper making, were all taken up one by one. The new Association took up research work in regard to village industries, applied the scientific outlook and improved them without altering their basic character, as village industries. The new Association not only did research work and effect practical improvements in village industries, but it also took up the intellectual challenge against the economic theories and propositions of capitalistic imperialism. A new school of Rural Economics based on the facts of life and of the needs of the millions in the villages arose and gathered strength and support. The material and mental revolution thus went one step forward. The importance of the work of the All-India Village Industries Association is steadily growing in the context of the present crisis in the world, under which, every nation is building up its own self-sufficiency in regard to primary needs like food, clothing, etc. If a third World War breaks out, the industrialized nations will divert all their energies to war production and thus consumer goods will become extremely scarce. Even where there are goods available, shipping difficulties will cut off transport. It is the Gandhian thesis that, for a peaceful and just world order, all countries should produce as far as possible their own primary needs and that no country should take undue economic advantage of another. But intellectual and cultural co-operation should increase and cover the whole of human relationship. To-day cultural and spiritual co-operation is made impossible because of political and economic exploitation.

As Gandhi and his co-workers in the Constructive Programme penetrated the villages more and more, the slavery of the 'untouchables' drew their attention. It was a more pernicious

slavery than the political slavery of India under the British. Untouchability appeared like an insurmountable obstacle in the way of the village movement. Moreover, how could a Nation which tolerated slavery within itself claim its freedom and fight for it? Gandhi found in untouchability a sin of the blackest dye. He therefore plunged with all his strength into a movement for the complete eradication of untouchability and for the full emancipation of the 'untouchables'. He gave the 'untouchables' a new name, i.e., the Harijans, meaning the children of God and started the Harijan Sevak Sangh to serve them and at the same time to call upon the so-called caste-Hindus to make atonement. The Harijan Movement was thus a double movement; it challenged the upper castes to make atonement and it challenged the Harijans to organize and assert themselves. The Harijan Movement under Gandhi swept the country and the prejudices and superstitions of centuries crumbled before it. The Harijan Sevak Sangh gave a great impetus to the education of the Harijans, to their social uplift and to the establishment of equality between the Harijans and the rest of the people in every sphere of life. The Hindu temples which had remained closed to the Harijans for uncounted centuries were thrown open to them and they were allowed the right of worship on exactly the same terms as to all other Hindus. In fact, under the inspiration of Gandhi the so-called caste leaders were stirred into repentance and they themselves came forward to lead the Harijans into the temples and to social equality. For the caste-Hindus it was a programme therefore of active atonement. For the Harijans themselves it was a programme of self-purification and self-assertion. The Harijan Movement is thus of the highest moral and social consequence to India. It was a bloodless revolution for the oppressed largely led by the repentent oppressors themselves and in which both combined to lay the foundations of a casteless society in India. Who could dream before Gandhi of a Casteless Hinduism in the whole of India? If ever there is a casteless India that would be largely due to the Harijan Movement under Gandhi. Dr. Ambedkhar once said that, so long as there was caste there would be the out-caste also. Mahatma Gandhi's answer was that as soon as untouchability was destroyed, caste would die a natural death and he proved it. While the Harijan Movement saved the Harijans from untouchability, it saved the Hindus from the caste-system. In the Constitution of free India the observance of untouchability in any shape or form has been made a punishable crime and the Harijans have been given absolute equality in law and in practice with everyone else in India. The way is now open therefore for the untouchables to cast away all fear and weakness and grow to their fullest height under the new conditions created for them in free India. The work of educational and economic uplift of the Harijans still remains to be completely achieved but there are now no obstacles anywhere in the way of it.

Reference has already been made to Basic Education. Basic Education represents the attempt inside the Constructive Programme at educational revolution. The All-India Organization

started by Gandhiji to take up this task was the Hindusthani Talimi Sangh. The system of education introduced and built up by the British in India was a costly and wasteful one, which could never fully reach the life of the people. After a hundred and fifty years of such education, India remained the most illiterate country in the world. Moreover, the British system of education was an alien system, which uprooted the people from their own cultural traditions, resulting in intellectual and spiritual frustration all round. Gandhi wanted a new system of education which would not be costly, would as far as possible be self-supporting and life centred instead of book-centred. It should also help to create a peaceful and just social order. He therefore took up the Basic Education Programme. Basic Education is best defined as education in and through work. From the concept and practice of Basic Education came pre-Basic Education, post-Basic Education and Adult Basic Education. Under British rule, the work of the Hindusthani Talimi Sangh remained largely a non-official one. But with the advent of Independence, the Central and State Governments are busy building up Basic Education throughout the country.

Next came the movement for organizing and training women to take their full share in National Reconstruction inside the Constructive Programme. The All-India Organization established for the purpose was the Kasturba National Memorial Trust in memory of Kasturba. Though this organization was started later than the others already mentioned its growth has been one of the most significant events in India in recent times. Moreover it should be remembered, that the movement for the freedom of women and for equal opportunities to them in every sphere of national life began long before the Kasturba National Memorial Trust was started. In fact, it began as early as Gandhi's first Satyagraha Movement in 1920 and 1921.

All over the world masculine superiority has in a final analysis rested on the fact that the defence of a country's freedom could be undertaken only by men and very little by women. The capacity to bear arms to safeguard freedom against aggression is the test on which men were deemed to be superior to handling the affairs of the world. Women have joined the army in small numbers in most countries and in the last war also women took some part in armed conflicts. Even so, the role of women in war was very little. It could not have been otherwise. Women cannot be trained easily and in sufficiently large numbers to engage in mass slaughter. The mother in every woman would rather tend and heal than wound and kill. Women therefore have generally accepted the stigma of inferiority rather than compete with men in the art of killing. In India under Gandhi, however, when Satyagraha was started the position was different and even reversed. In non-violent resistance the emphasis was on facing suffering instead of inflicting suffering and on facing death instead of killing. In the Satyagraha Movements therefore, the women of India came

forward quickly to share fully with men in every vicissitude in the field of non-violent battle. When the women of India went to prison, faced lathi-charges and even bullets along with the men in the non-violent fight for freedom, all the traditional assumptions of masculine superiority were swept away at one stroke. The achievement of the freedom of women and their rise to full equality with men was thus achieved in India without going through the slow and laborious stages by which women in other lands secured their freedom and equality. To-day women have the equal right of vote with men and no profession or occupation is closed to them. We have already had at least one Woman Governor of a State and Women Ministers in the Central and State Cabinets. All this was achieved without any struggle or strain on the part of the women themselves, thanks to the impact of the non-violent movements of Gandhi for all-round freedom.

The Kasturba National Memorial Trust only formalized and stabilised what had been achieved already in the emancipation and uplift of women in India. It took up the training of women workers in every sphere of national life and specially of women and children in the villages. There is at least one Training Centre in every State with branch centres scatterd over the whole country. The training given is in child welfare, in village health, in pre-basic education, in rural medical service and in Samagra Grama Seva. This movement has already established more contact with the masses than any of the organizations founded earlier. One distinguished foreign visitor characterized the Kasturba Trust Movement as the most significant of all the works of Gandhi in India. When the women in the villages become wide awake and conscious of their legitimate place, as also their responsibility, in reconstructing Indian Society, then will surely come the day for this ancient country to rise to its fullest height. That day is drawing nearer through the work of the Kasturba Trust.

The Hindusthani Prachar Sabha was started earlier than most of the other organizations. It took up the question of a common national language for India. India has several old and highly developed languages like Tamil, Telugu, Canarese, Malayalam, Bengalee, Marathy, Gujerati, Hindustani, etc. But the unity of India required a common national language. The British had tried to impose English as the common language but not even one per cent of the people learnt it or knew it in a hundred and fifty years of British rule. But a large majority of the people of India have Hindustani either as their mother-tongue or understand it pretty well. Logically therefore Hindustani was the best fitted to be the national language. The only difficulty was that in the whole of South India there was no Hindusthani at all. Gandhiji therefore began his labours as early as thirty years ago through the Hindusthani Prachar Sabha to spread the national language in South India. So much work was done in this respect during the last thirty years that to-day Hindusthani is no longer an outside language in South India. In the Constitution of India to-day,

Hindusthani has been declared to be the national language but it was Gandhi that paved the way for this common national language and made it acceptable to the people. So, as in many other fields, Gandhi laboured for a common national language also with the strength of a giant.

Another great All-India Organization which Gandhi founded and developed was the Go-Seva Sangh for the conservation and development of the cattle wealth of the country and for pioneering work in agriculture. Cattle and land are inextricably bound up together in the basic economy of India. The Go-Seva Sangh trains every year a large number of workers in the field of cattle improvement and agriculture.

Besides these All-India Organizations there were other items of the Constructive Programme which were developed without separate organizations. Communal unity was such an item, for which Gandhi laboured hard and for which he finally laid down his life. India is a land of many religions and therefore of many communities. The Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Buddhists, the Sikhs, the Parsees and the Jains are with us all the time. Most of these communities had lived together peacefully for several centuries by the time the British came and took over India. Under pressure of the divide and rule policy of the British, separatist and destructive tendencies developed among the various communities and particularly so after the introduction of separate communal electorates. In the building up of a united India Gandhi therefore found himself up against these separatist tendencies. He took up communal unity as a vital item in the Constructive Programme. For him Hindu-Muslim Unity became the symbol of all communal unity in India. He made the Congress itself the instrument for the work of accomplishing communal unity. As early as in 1924 he undertook a prolonged fast to cement Hindu-Muslim unity and an All-India Communal Unity Conference was then held to stabilise the results of the fast. Gandhi was never tired of repeating that Hindu-Muslim unity alone could bring freedom to the country. It looked at one stage as though he had succeeded in establishing Hindu-Muslim unity. But suddenly towards the end of his life, a series of events culminated in the Muslims demanding a separate State, i.e., Pakistan under the leadership of Jinnah. Gandhi met Jinnah again and again for the sake of unity but he failed to carry Jinnah with him and he had to accept the partition of India at last with a broken heart. Even after partition, he passionately pleaded for Hindu-Muslim unity to establish Indo-Pakistan unity. In the terrible months immediately following partition, when Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and in the Punjab were locked together in a tragic conflict of hatred and violence, Gandhi "lived so dangerously" for the good of both the Hindus and the Muslims that an infuriated Hindu fanatic attacked him fatally with a gun and thus cut away a life that the world needed most at the moment. Outwardly Gandhi's work for Hindu-Muslim unity appeared to have failed. But to people who

can analyse the might-have-beens in India without a Gandhi, he has not failed even in this regard. Even after partition, there are in India nearly as many millions of Muslims as in Pakistan and there are still in Pakistan some ten millions of Hindus. If these millions of Muslims in India and Hindus in Bengal have not been violently uprooted and thrown into a conflict unto death, it is entirely due to the spirit and work of Gandhi for communal good-will. The greatest of all legacies left behind by Gandhi is this one of good-will and understanding between all the commuities in India. And so, India is to-day a Secular State guaranteeing equal justice and opportunity to every community. Who then will say that Gandhi failed even here? Like Hindu-Muslim unity, other items in the Constructive Programme were worked out in a general way. For a full study of the subject, Grama Sevaks must refer to the two booklets entitled " The Constructive Programme ", one by Gandhi and the other by Rajendra Prasad.

What has been described above is only a very brief picture of the Constructive Programme. That programme was meant not only to win the freedom of India but to set the pattern for that freedom under Indian Independence. For Gandhi, political freedom was never an end in itself. Political freedom for him simply meant the removal of a great obstacle in the way of building up a new social order of peace and justice. We have instances in human history of attempts to make justice without peace and peace without justice. In both cases, justice and peace were equally unreal or impermanent. Russia, for instance, has justice reared on organized violence and this is a typical example of justice without the values of peace. The British Empire in India was typical of peace without justice. Gandhi wanted a world in which all would live peacefully and with full justice to everybody. He, therefore, wanted to achieve justice only through non-violent means. It was his faith that thus alone could justice and peace live together. If we examine the problem of justice and peace carefully, we can discover that justice and violence are contradictory and that when violence enters by the front door, justice must depart by the back door. Violence is required only where injustice, in some form or other, requires to be maintained. Wherever there is voilence we have the *a-priori* evidence that some injustice or other is near-about. Gandhi's dream of justice obtained through peaceful methods or of peace based on justice is therefore the most revolutionary social concept in human history. This idea of a social order of equal justice and equal peace is now enshrined in the concept of Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya, meaning the total freedom of all and total justice for all, irrespective of class or caste or creed, is the non-violent answer of Gandhi to the Communist challenge of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to be achieved by violence. During the last thirty years, Gandhi has set the Sarvodaya ideal before himself and India and he himself moved towards it, step by step, taking the millions by the hand and showing them the way. The significance of Sarvodaya for the world to-day is therefore far-reaching. At the moment it appears unreal and impractical

against the background of a world driven to the brink of a third World War to be fought out by such deadly weapons as will completely destroy human civilisation. The ideal of Sarvodaya to be achieved through the Constructive Programme and non-violent direct action is the only streak of light and sanity in a mad world under the shadow of growing darkness. Khadi, Village Industries, Harijan Service, Basic Education, etc., are all the external disciplines rooted in the central inner idea that Love is more powerful than Hate, the Spirit is more powerful than Armaments and Self-reliance and Self-sufficiency the only proof against exploitation and slavery. The Constructive Programme combined with Satyagraha is the way out for a world caught in the ever-growing conflicts of competition and violence. All over the world nations have fought for freedom through violence and it was only after they had so attained their freedom that they turned their minds to the constructive tasks for stabilising freedom. This has not on the whole worked satisfactorily. That is why revolutionary movements which strove for liberty, equality and fraternity ended up in autocracy or plutocracy. Gandhi on the other hand sought to build up the freedom of the people from the bottom upwards on the basis of self-criticism self-reliance and human service in the widest sense of the term. He, therefore, put the Constructive Programme ahead of his schedule for political freedom. He made India understand the meaning of freedom before freedom itself came, trained the people to be free before Independence was achieved and thus set the pattern for building up the structure and stabilising the content of freedom.

It is one of the strangest and most significant coincidence in history that Village Reconstruction, Political Freedom and the achievement of justice through peaceful methods were all worked out simultaneously within a comprehensive people's programme of constructive work. The more we understand the meaning of this phenomenon and the more we work out its implications, the better we shall mould the India of Gandhi's dream.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE FIRKA DEVELOPMENT (RURAL WELFARE) SCHEME FITS IN.

With the advent of the political freedom the Central and State Governments have passed into the hands of Congressmen. It was under Gandhi that the Indian National Congress grew strong enough to take over the Government of the country. The parting with the British was friendly. This itself was a unique thing to happen. It was possible because our Freedom Movement was both non-violent and constructive. Never before had a conquered people fought the conquerors and turned them out and yet remained so unreservedly friendly.

When the Central and State Governments passed into the hands of Congressmen, the people naturally looked up to the Congress Ministers to redeem the pledges they had made during the days of struggle and suffering. Total prohibition was one of the pledges the Congress had given to the people. Naturally, therefore, Congress Governments introduced prohibition. The Madras State led the way and other States followed. To-day the whole of the Madras State has come under prohibition. It was Madras again which led the way for the rest of India in adopting the Constructive Programme as its own. The Firka Development Scheme, now known as the Rural Welfare Scheme, represents the earnest attempt on the part of the Madras Government to work the Constructive Programme directly under Government auspices. Grama Sevaks who are working this scheme and for whom this little volume is primarily written, must already know something of the detailed programme included in it. Its salient features may, however, be re-stated here.

The original idea, which still holds the field, was to put through a programme of self-help and self-sufficiency in the thirty-four selected firkas of the State. A firka was selected in each district and generally consisted of forty to fifty villages with a population of forty to fifty thousand. Self-help meant, training villagers to look after themselves and all their needs without waiting for the Government to do everything for them. Villagers were to make their own roads, dig their own wells, construct their own drains, clean up the villages, build school-houses, establish co-operative stores, etc. The Government would give only technical aid and part of the expenses. Every village was to have its own Panchayat and its Grama Seva Sangh. These two would jointly take up the whole task of making life in the villages fuller, more prosperous, happier and altogether better organized. Self-sufficiency meant achieving the maximum possible self-dependence in regard to food and clothing. These were the basic ideas behind the Firka Development Scheme.

Mahatma Gandhi had shown the way through the Constructive Programme. Therefore, Khadi, Village Industries, Basic Education, improved agriculture, village sanitation, co-operation had all their place in the new scheme put forward by the Madras Government. The Government created the necessary administrative and executive machinery and provided the funds. Rupees one crore was set apart for the work. The scheme itself was drawn up by a Committee with important constructive workers in it. Detailed instructions and circulars were drawn up for the guidance of the workers under the new scheme. The then Premier of Madras wisely chose an experienced constructive worker under Gandhi to be the Head of the Department. He was also given a large measure of freedom to make the detailed programmes of work and to carry them out in the spirit and pattern of the Constructive programme. Thus suddenly, the Constructive Programme and a large number of constructive workers had laboured hard in the

villages even before the advent of political freedom, found themselves inside the Government circle. This was a significant transformation with important consequences. The old programme of the people became the new programme of the Government. People everywhere in the villages welcomed the scheme with open arms. They were relieved and elated to find that the contradiction between constructive work and Government work had disappeared. The villagers are a shrewd people. When they saw the Government adopting the Constructive Programme and constructive workers willing to work under the Government, they knew at once that something very important was happening with which they were deeply concerned. They enthusiastically offered their full co-operation in working the scheme.

Road-making and the digging of wells became the earlier pre-occupations of the village people under the new scheme. They had always desperately needed roads connecting village with village. They certainly also needed nothing else as good wells. Government was always ready under the new scheme to meet part of the cost of making roads and wells. The villagers put in collective bodily labour as their contribution. Similarly, new schools began to spring up in the villages. Khadi production was given an important place under the new scheme and gin-charkas, carding bows, spinning wheels and cotton were supplied to the villagers by the Government. The Harijan Uplift Programme also received a great impetus. Voluntary squads took up sanitation work. Government provided community latrines often at half-cost. It was easy to build latrines but difficult to maintain them properly under village conditions. This was a good test of the sincerity of the people. The villagers stood the test in many places. Grama Seva Sanghams sprang up everywhere and took up responsibility for a variety of good works in the villages. The new scheme thus brought a real awakening to the villages.

What is of special importance was the fact that the Government directly took up khadi production. This gave a new impetus to the old Khadi Movement. When Government itself produced khadi and its departments bought and consumed the khadi so produced then the way became clear for adequate quantities of khadi being made available all round. And then, what can be better propaganda for khadi than this kind of co-operation from the Government? In the wake of khadi, Government has also taken up the matter of developing cottage and village industries. For khadi production the Government took the assistance of the All-India Spinners Association. It has taken the advice and assistance of the All-India Village Industries Association to promote village industries. Sanitation has been given all the prominence it deserves and Grama Sevaks and Grama Seva Sanghams have plunged into this work with sustained earnestness. The new scheme has also started a Village Libraries' Movement and it has so far worked with remarkable success. For the first time all available literature on the life and work of Gandhi and on the Constructive Programme has been made available to people in the

villages. For improving agriculture the main items so far taken up are the distribution of better seeds and detailed training in converting all village waste and filth into good compost-manure. For the first time again the possibility of villages having drainage systems has come into the picture. A batch of Grama Sevaks and other officers of the department were trained at the headquarters of the All-India Village Industries Association and these will now start two centres, one in Tamilnad and the other in Andhra, for training village industries' workers. Workers so trained will spread improved methods of production in the villages.

More important than the practical work done so far is the change that has come in the mind and habits of the people in the villages concerned. Self-reliance is now abroad in these villages. If the bunds of the village tank require to be raised or strengthened, the villagers go ahead and do it, Government and the village bearing the cost together. If a school building is necessary, they just build it and then Government steps in and pays half the cost. Making roads, digging wells, constructing drains and community latrines, etc., are all going on in the same style in the selected firkas. The village panchayats established against the background of the work of Firka Development have become more real. If the panchayats succeed in these villages, it will be largely due to the new scheme, which has educated the villagers to be self-reliant. Self-sufficiency in food and clothing is a more difficult task and will take more time to achieve. But the whole work is moving in the right direction.

Training is necessary for any organized work. It is specially necessary for those who work in villages. All the workers in the Firka Development Scheme are getting sound training. In fact, the training given is exactly what is given in the All-India Organizations of Constructive Work and in the Ashrams started under the inspiration of Gandhi. A growing body of village workers is thus obtaining training in the Constructive Programme. Grama Sevaks so trained, though working under Government, are not officials in the villages but servants of the people. This by itself is a good piece of work. Every Grama Sevak is something like a Gandhi Missionary in the villages. Thanks to the facilities given to him under the new scheme, he is able to take fully into the villages the ideas and methods of the Constructive Programme as laid down by Gandhi. The thought and ideas of Gandhiji are thus spreading in the villages at a quicker pace than was possible when the Constructive Programme was entirely in the hands of non-officials. If the Firka Development Scheme is fully implemented it will rebuild the villages on the Gandhian pattern.

The Central Government in Delhi has taken up some important items of village industries. Take, for instance, the palm-gur industry or the ghani industry. The Central Government has appointed one of the workers of the All-India Village Industries' Association as their Palm-gur Adviser and another as the Secretary

of the Central Cottage Industries Board. In the Firka Development Scheme also these industries will become more and more important. The village ghani or oil-press is a very important item in village economy. This village industry has persisted in the face of every kind of competition from the oil mills. It is the village ghani which still gives nutritive oils in the villages. The Central Government is backing State Governments in improving and spreading village industries.

Thus, what is of real significance in the Firka Development Scheme is that it has accepted the Gandhian Plan for our villages. The scheme puts the village in the centre of nation-building and directs specific attention to village problems. Of equal importance is the fact that while Government helps with funds and techinical advice, the work itself is largely left to the Grama Seva Sanghams which are people's associations in the villages. To the extent the department is able to enlist the co-operation of constructive workers and the people themselves will be the measure of the success of the scheme. Government may furnish funds, set up the administrative machinery, make raw materials and technical assistance available but the scheme must largely remain a scheme of the people, by the people and for the people if it is to succeed. That is why the panchayats and the Grama Seva Sanghams are the two most important factors for the success of the scheme. The Grama Seva Sanghams specially must be strengthened at every stage. The basis of the scheme is self-reliance and self-sufficiency. That has always been the basis of the Constructive Programme. In fact, as already mentioned, the Firka Development Scheme is the Constructive Programme taken over by the Government. There is no conflict between thre official mind and the people's mind in regard to the scheme. India is independent and Congressmen are in charge of Central and State Governments. What is therefore more natural than that the non-official programme of yesterday has become the official programme of to-day, without becoming too much 'official'. The success of the Firka Development Scheme will be nothing less than success of the Constructive Programme in the Madras State.

CHAPTER VI.

GRAMA SEVA : STEP BY STEP.

General remarks.—We have now to come to grips with the methodology of Grama Seva. The ideology set forth in some detail may help and inspire the Grama Sevak, but his work itself has to be carefully planned and even more carefully executed. It is not enough to have enthusiasm and vision. It is necessary to know how village work can be taken up step by step. We must

solve problems and not create new ones. The methodology is thus even more important than the ideology.

I. *The method.*—The first thing to understand is that there can be no rigidity or finality about the method. Surely, it is not enough to do something somehow in the village. At the same time, what is good for one village may be bad for another. What is a good beginning in one village may be a bad ending in another. Not only objective conditions differ from village to village, but even the human factor will vary. The worker should carefully study the conditions in each village and then exercise his own mind to find out what has to be done. Objective conditions in a village must be carefully studied. Equally the mind of the village should also be studied before anything is done. What has to be done, and where and how, will depend on a true balancing of the objective and subjective or mental data in the village. Therefore, let us begin by agreeing that there can be no set method applicable everywhere and at all times.

II. *The Grama Sevak himself.*—In Grama Seva the Grama Sevak himself is of primary importance. He is the village servant who must set the example in responsibility and service. What then should be his qualifications? He should have a clear grasp of the ideology and methodology of the Constructive Programme. A mere intellectual grasp will not suffice. He must have a faith in the programme, a faith that comes from a deep realization of the great good in the programme. He must be free from the town complex. Material and mental values are very different in village and town. Two annas in a town, for instance, will be worth very little. But two annas in a village may make all the difference between life and death. Worship of a village deity will be the highest religion in the village. It might look nonsense in a town. In a village it may be wrong to accost a woman you do not know or even give her a 'namaste'. In the town that may be true courtesy.

The Grama Sevak must remember he is in the village to improve it. He should therefore know that, the shrewd villager will watch him carefully to find out, if he himself is living the improved pattern. He should ask villagers to do nothing he will not do himself. He should take no town fineries into the village. Do not go to the village with a tooth-brush and paste. Learn to break a neem twig and how to use it to clean the teeth.

Let there be no superiority complex in the worker. Let him not think he can teach villagers everything. May be villagers can teach him a lot. He should be humble enough to give careful attention to the habits and traditions in the village, even if seeking to change them. He must be simple and disciplined in his own life. Let him not talk too much. Let him listen patiently. But when he has to talk, let him talk clearly and explain fully. If he is a family man he must show how to build up a happy and busy home himself. Where he lives will be his real headquarters, even if there is some kind of an office elsewhere. If he does not keep

his own home spotlessly clean, he dare not ask others to keep their homes clean. He must not be a partisan in the village nor take sides in a quarrel. He must remain impartial and yet stand up for truth and fairplay. His personal character must be above suspicion. He must never be lazy. Laziness is as bad as dishonesty. As far as possible, let him do nothing without consultation and even consent. He may be convinced of something but let him convince others too before he changes or alters anything. Let him not always try to do everything himself. That is easy. It is more difficult to train villagers to co-operate with him and to do what is necessary. The home of the Grama Sevak must be something of an Ashram where prayer, work, study and recreation will combine harmoneously.

III. *Where to begin.*—Who can say where exactly village work should begin and where it should end. This depends on so many factors. But some suggestions can be made which can be of use. The worker may be tempted to take up too many items at the same time or begin at the wrong point, so that, instead of removing difficulties he may be creating them. The Grama Sevak may, therefore, find the following hints useful :—

(1) What is the most urgent need in the village? In other words, what is the need, the urgency of which is easily accepted by the largest number of people in the village?

(2) What is the work in which the largest number of people in the village are willing to co-operate readily?

(3) What measure of goodwill and confidence will a certain item of work create?

(4) What is the item of work which once begun may be fully completed without taking too much time or cost? Remember villagers would like to see a thing begun and ended within reasonable time and cost. Long-range work is, therefore, never a good beginning.

IV. *Village survey.*—No real work can be done without knowing the conditions in the village. In other words, a good village survey is the pre-requisite for any village work. A survey will take time, perhaps a month. A survey to be thorough must be objective. The various headings under which information is required must be carefully listed. The All-India Village Industries' Association in Maganwadi, Wardha, has put up a pattern for village survey which might be useful to every Grama Sevak. A survey is not a mechanical process and it is not enough to have certain figures. The mental climate must also be carefully studied and this means a study of the attitudes and habits of the village. The following points may be kept in mind to obtain a good survey :—

(1) *The geography of the village* :

What is the location in reference to streams, hills, tanks, roads, etc.? How are the streets laid out? How are the houses fitted in? What are the difficulties for drainage and sanitation because of the location and construction of houses?

(2) *The history of the village:*
How old is the village? How many houses have been built or given up and how many families have come or gone during the last fifty years? What is the story of the village temple and tank? What crafts and industries have grown and decayed and when and how? Who were the leading men and women? What kind of leadership is now available? Who are the enthusiastic young men and women? What are the quarrels and disputes inside the village and how are they settled?

(3) *Social facts:*
What are the castes in the village and the different communities? What are their relations to each other? What are the customs, habits and festivals? What has been the impact of outside events on village life in the last fifty years? Did the village play any part in the Freedom Movement, for or against the Congress? What is the condition of the Harijans and what efforts have been made to improve them? What religions are represented and what are their relations with each other?

(4) *Economic conditions:*
What are the occupations and crafts? What is the state of agriculture, what crops are grown, what are the irrigation facilities, what are the methods of manuring, etc.? What is the cattle wealth? What is the kind of ownership of land? What is the income from agriculture, individually and collectively and from industries and crafts? What crafts have grown or decayed and why? How is the population divided at various income-levels? What are the relations between the landowners and the land labourers, etc.? Is there any factory labour and what are the conditions?

(5) *Educational data:*
How many children go to school and how many do not and why? How many generally complete education in local schools and what percentage generally goes up for higher education? What happens to the educated boys and girls? What is the effect of education on village economy? Collect special data about the education of girls under similar headings. Is there any adult education? What is the percentage of literacy?

(6) *Sanitation, food and health:*
What is the food situation in detail? What is the village diet and what are its deficiencies? Are vegetables grown and used or sold? What oils are used? What is the state of sanitation, individual, home and village? Where are the plague spots? What is the nature of drinking water-supply? What are the unclean and unhealthy habits? What are the superstitions in regard to sanitation and health? Is milk available or eggs? Are people

vegetarians or otherwise? What are the common diseases? What epidemics have broken out in the last ten or twenty years? Which is the nearest dispensary or hospital? Is there a midwife? What is the death-rate and infant-mortality?

(7) *Recreations and culture* :

Are there any village games or entertainments? Is there folk music or folk dance? What are the village festivals? Is there gambling or any illicit liquor? What are the cultural traditions? Have modern games or other entertainments like the cinema come in?

N.B.—Information may be gathered under the above headings. There is nothing to prevent more headings being drawn up and more information collected. Only less will be insufficient. Most village workers only play with village surveys. Even while they make a survey, they do so more to make a show of it, than to make use of it. The scientific attitude in village work makes it imperative that there should be a thorough survey and that all plans of work must be based on the precise information so collected.

V. *Adult education.*—The education of boys and girls is for the making of to-morrow but the education of the adults is for the making of to-day. No work of importance in the village, here and now, is possible without adult education. Who are the village adults? They are the fathers, the husbands and the elders generally; who are the bread-winners of the families, both men and women. They are the village public and their opinion is the only public opinion in the village. You cannot do a thing in the village, with any hope of success, unless you carry this public opinion with you. The village adults are difficult persons. He or she is suspicious, conservative, obstinate and shrewd. For centuries they have lived within their villages, with little intercourse with the outside world, except occasionally for going to the nearest market or temple or town. Their mental horizon is strictly limited. They have the conviction that visitors from outside always come to exploit or cheat them. They, therefore, suspect all new-comers, and much more their proposals for reforming the village. They will look on every one of the actions of the Grama Sevak. The first reaction to any suggestion for improvement made by anybody will be, "What is the fellow up to?" Even when the first barriers of suspicion are cleared away, the Grama Sevak will be continually under the scrutiny of the whole village. Even after the Grama Sevak has become popular and trusted the general attitude in the village will be, "You want to improve things. It is none of our business. If you want to, you go ahead and do what you like, but leave us out." Now this will not do. No work in the village is possible if the village adults do not make it their own. The process of making village adults feel that our programme is their own is largely our adult education work in the village.

Therefore the whole of our work must rest on adult education. For us, adult education is education of the grown-ups in the widest sense. Literacy is only a small part of it. Whatever the Grama

Sevak wants to do in the village, whether it is sanitation or better agriculture or better health or recreation or improved village industries, etc., nothing can succeed without carrying conviction to the village adults about the same. The process of carrying conviction to adults, in everything that matters to them, is our adult education programme and that is the only adult education worth the name in the village. That is why adult education is the basis of all other work in the village. The Grama Sevak will not be able to do much even with the children or the boys and the girls in a village, without enlisting the understanding co-operation of the adults.

How then shall he organize adult education in the village? We shall neither begin nor end adult education with literacy. We shall begin with befriending village adults. We shall keep in touch with them in their homes, in the fields and in their workshops. If the villager is a farmer, we shall show him how to make the best compost manure from every kind of waste in the village, how to get fair prices for his produce, how to cure his sick cattle, etc. If he is a handloom weaver we shall help him to get regular supplies of yarn, to make better patterns in what he weaves and to market his goods without being cheated by middlemen. If he is a blacksmith or a carpenter or a potter, we shall help him in the same way. We should help village women by putting them in touch with the nearest midwife, by taking some care of their children, by providing them with Maganchoolas or smokeless ovens, etc. Through such service, we shall win the goodwill of the adults and make him or her more aware of their opportunities and their duties. That will be true adult education. If the village is dirty and if we show to the adults how disease and death come from insanitation, that again will be true adult education. Adult education should not be confined to work at a particular school-centre in the village. There is no harm in having such a centre provided it only supplements the adult education work conceived and carried out in the above manner. An adult education centre which merely teaches reading and writing or some subjects through conversation will not be sufficient to meet the needs of the situation. But, where the larger work is going on, the centre itself will be useful. Lessons in sanitation, nutrition and health, in history, in geography, elementary science, elementary sociology, etc., can be given long before the adults have learnt to read and write. This is done through conversations, stories, dramatics or kathas, etc. As this kind of oral and visual education goes on, the adults will naturally develop a keen desire to learn reading and writing. It is at the point, when such a keen desire manifests itself, that the Grama Sevak should commence his literacy work. He will then find that, though he did not begin his lessons in literacy earlier, the work will go forward more eagerly and quickly. This is the psychological reason why the Grama Sevak should not begin with literacy. And, surely he cannot end with literacy, because literacy is never an end in itself, but only the means for further education.

Adult education so conceived must place before itself definite objectives to be achieved and certain general methods to be followed. The object should be to give every adult in free India a minimum amount of knowledge, which he or she cannot do without in living a useful and happy life. It is the birthright of every adult in a free country to obtain such a minimum of knowledge. More may be given, if possible, but less may not be tolerated. What is this minimum knowledge? It may well be as follows :—

(1) Knowledge of a balanced diet and how to get it under village conditions.

(2) Knowledge of Sanitation and Health.

(3) Knowledge of Elementary Geography and History of the village, of the district, of India and, if possible, of the world.

(4) Knowledge of Elementary Science.

(5) Some knowledge of the social and economic factors of the village and the country. This will include family budgeting and planning of family life.

(6) Some knowledge of the Constitution and the laws under which adults live in India.

(7) Some knowledge of the culture and religions of India. This will also include some knowledge of the Social Ideal for which adults have to live and labour in free India.

Now a word about the method or methods. There can be no set method but adult education must be generally conducted centered round the work and life of the adults in the village. Every situation in the life and work of the adults must be pressed into service for education. The educational programme at the school centre itself must be based on and correlated to the bigger background of the life and work of the whole village. At the school centre itself, oral and visual education must be carefully organized in such a way that adult education becomes instructive recreation for the adults, who are engaged throughout the day in some hard work or other, to make a living for themselves and their families. The school centre must therefore be tidy, cheerful and recreative with, if possible, provision for some cheap and innocent refreshment.

N.B.—To carry out such adult education work, the Grama Sevak, who has already had training in Grama Seva, should be given at least a three months' course of further training in the adult education as set forth above.

VI. *Sanitation and Health.*—It is difficult to decide whether adult education or sanitation should be taken up earlier. The difficulty is solved only by resolving that sanitation work should be taken up as part of adult education and adult education should primarily centre round sanitation projects. A Grama Sevak in a particular village may make sanitation the starting point for village work and he may be fully justified. Sanitation is one of bitterest needs in villages. Mahatma Gandhi had often said that sanitation must be first step in Village Reconstruction.

The sight of filth everywhere in the village is perhaps the first challenge, not only to the eyes but to the mind of every Grama Sevak, who enters a village. Filth everywhere is not merely an external phenomenon but is the direct result of bad habits, mental and moral. It means mental laziness, lack of the co-operative spirit, carelessness as to what happens to neighbours and to the community and above all the easy readiness to put up with anything. It is not very difficult to explain to villagers what a disgrace and danger is insanitation to the village. That is why sanitation is often a good starting-point of work. Let us now see how this work can be taken up and organized with maximum good results for the village. The following are suggestions for taking up the work step by step :—

(1) *The object.*—The first step is to understand the object. The object is not merely the mechanical cleaning and polishing, but the inculcation and development of the sanitation-consciousness in the villagers. The object is to clean up the mental attitudes and habits of uncleanliness. The work is therefore educational.

(2) *The approach.*—The approach should be psychological and educational. Explain fully the why and the how of sanitation. Make villagers understand the need, the dangers and the possibilities. Let no work actually begin unless villagers understand, why it must begin then and there and are willing to co-operate. For the Grama Sevak, to personally plunge into sanitation work before the villagers are ready to co-operate, will be the wrong thing to do.

(3) *Co-operation.*—Make the villagers understand the need for sanitation and thus create at least a small village group, which will co-operate in the first sanitation projects. Let the little group consist of enthusiastic youngsters. Let not the Grama Sevak be the leader in the work. Let some enthusiastic youngster lead and let the group feel they are doing the work. Through such a small group the Grama Sevak should pull up more and more co-operation. Remember, women might help more than men in sanitation work. Make permanent sanitation squads.

(4) *Work itself.*—The work itself will consist of a preliminary survey of sanitary conditions, making projects, executing them and discussing results in common. One project must lead on to another.

(5) *Positive aspects.*—Do not look upon sanitation work as simply the removal of filth and dirt. That is only the negative aspect. The positive aspect will consist of two things mainly. The first is to convert filth and dirt into wealth by composting manure with them. The second is to put in some touch of beauty or job at spots from where filth and dirt are removed. If an open space was once indiscriminately used as a common public latrine and it was cleaned up, then, do not leave a vacuum there. Make it into a playground for children, putting up a few items of equipment for the same or make a little flower garden with pretty plants and tulsies.

(6) *Organization.*—Make use of sanitation projects to create organized activity in which more and more men and women will fit in. What the villagers lack is the capacity for collective work. Develop that capacity through sanitation projects.

(7) *Education.*—Sanitation is magnificent work for educating the village mind. When villagers are made to understand that dirt and filth lead to disease and death when neglected and that it can be converted into manure and wealth and better food if properly utilized, then indeed they have received some vital education. Let the Grama Sevak analyse the existing conditions, explain the dangers, demonstrate how the matter can be tackled and finally show not only practical results but their significance. That will be education in and through sanitation. Let the Grama Sevak use charts, pictures, diagrams and magic-lantern slides.

VII. *Food and Agriculture.*—No one can exist without food but most people seem to exist with little right knowledge about food. Village food is very largely locally grown. Therefore food and agriculture are intimately mixed up in village life. The Grama Sevak should himself study carefully the possibilities for a balanced diet in the village in which he works. He should study the common village diet and find out what are the deficiencies and how these can be remedied by making the maximum use of what is available in the village itself or in the immediate surroundings. He will encourage and organize kitchen gardens for more vegetables. He will encourage poultry-keeping and goat-rearing, etc., to provide more eggs and more cheap milk. He will certainly encourage cow-keeping for a little more milk for the village children. In regard to improved agriculture he must study how to get and utilize improved seeds and how to make compost-manure using all available waste and filth. These two items should be studied and worked thoroughly. The village farmer is a hard-working realist. Perhaps, he will be able to teach the Grama Sevak much more than the Grama Sevak can teach him. Even so, he has got into a rut in regard to many things which affect him. That is why the Grama Sevak can help him. He must be pulled out of the rut where and when necessary. Take for instance, the waste of valuable land by giving it away to unnecessary paths, borders, broad-bunds, etc. The ploughing and preparing of the soil can be improved with better implements. That does not mean tractors everywhere but only better ploughs. Then comes the question of effectively conserving available water-supply for irrigation. Tanks must be deepened, their bunds strengthened and raised, and even new tanks dug. Little streams may be easily held up behind the small dams and the water so collected used to extend cultivation. This is very rarely done and must now be done. Even waste water from the kitchens and bathing places should be taken on to vegetable plots. Any Grama Sevak who permits any waste to be wasted is wasting his time in the village!

Better storing and marketing facilities should be organized. There is then the question of collective farming. Co-operative farming may be better but will be more difficult in our country, whereas collective farming can be attempted with good hope of success. Why should not villagers be persuaded to pool land, manure, bullocks and implements, if no one will lose any of his share in the produce, proportionate to his contribution? This work must now begin, whatever be the difficulties. The Grama Sevak may not be an expert in agriculture but he should know from where and how to get expert guidance. For better storing and marketing the Grama Sevak Sanghams and panchayats must combine and also take help from the Government.

VIII. *Village Industries.*—We have already seen how agriculture and agro-industries are the two lungs of village prosperity and how injury to one will ultimately injure the other. Agro-industries are village industries and cannot stand except against the agricultural background. Equally agriculture by itself cannot sustain village prosperity. Villagers need not only food but clothes, vessels, implements, carts and a variety of other things for daily life. Therefore the spinner, weaver, carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leather-worker, etc., are all workers close to the soil, and so to say first cousins, of the farmers. The village is thus a joint family in which everybody knows everybody else and the interest of each is the interest of all. The Grama Sevak has therefore to give careful attention to village industries. There are some industries which are still strong in the village, others have been weakened but linger on and yet others which have been completely knocked out by changing conditions and specially by competition from outside. Village industries which still remain strong must be further strengthened and better organized and made more efficient. Those that just linger on must also be given similar treatment. In the case of those which have perished, enquiry should be made in regard to the causes and conditions leading to decay. May be, some industries cannot be revived and may be, some can be revived with advantage to village economy.

The foremost village industry is, of course, cloth-making. That means hand-spinning and hand-weaving. In many places hand-spinning will have perished and hand-weaving might still hold the ground. Therefore hand-spinning is a case for revival and hand-weaving a case for reorganization. Thanks to Mahatma Gandhi and the Khadi Movement, both these items of work were taken up and have gone on during the last twenty-five years. The All-India Spinners' Association and several other independent institutions have done excellent work in this field already and yet only the fringe of the problem has been touched. The Grama Sevak must know ginning, carding and spinning well and know enough of weaving to be able to help the weavers to organize themselves for better production. Most Grama Sevaks have had this training already. He must now take up this work in his area systematically. Every Firka Development (Rural

Welfare) Officer has already received instructions to introduce one thousand charkas within the firka within an year. Perhaps some good work has already been done in this direction. Nevertheless, the following points may be useful in implementing the programme :—

(1) Maintain an instruction and demonstration centre at which any one who wishes to learn ginning, carding and spinning can obtain the necessary training.

(2) Maintain a stock of all the implements necessary. If possible, as many of these implements should be made locally, thus giving work to local carpenters, blacksmiths, etc., Implements must be distributed on the present subsidy basis only to those who will use them regularly.

(3) Where cotton is locally grown, spinning-families should be instructed to stock cotton at the proper season. Where possible, cotton-growing should be further encouraged as part of this programme. Where cotton is not locally available and cannot be produced on the spot, a sufficient stock of cotton should be kept for distribution to spinners. In a number of places the whole work is held up because cotton supply is not regular.

(4) Every spinner should have the certainty that the yarn produced will either be purchased for ready cash or for conversion into cloth for the family or for sale.

(5) If the yarn cannot be woven locally it should be sent to the intensive khadi centres run by the department.

(6) Educational propaganda must go hand-in-hand with organizational work to make it clear in the village that Khadi work is profitable and well-suited to village conditions. The idology of the Khadi Movement must spread along with the work.

(7) Khadi work should never appear as one imposed from outside. It should be work developed from within the village. The Grama Sevak and the village itself must realize that it is the first step in constructive work in the village. It is the first test if our work has begun in the right way. The Grama Sevak himself should use Khadi only and he should induce others to do the same. He should work in close co-operation with the nearest branch of the All-India Spinners' Association and spread whatever literature the association has produced in his area.

But hand-spinning and hand-weaving constitute only the first step in village industries. The next step is to strengthen other village industries which are still alive. Here is the list of such industries :—

(1) Carpentry.
(2) Blacksmithy.
(3) Metal-works.
(4) Leather works.
(5) Mat and basket-making.
(6) Paddy-husking, flour-grinding.
(7) Pottery.
(8) Toy-making.
(9) Soap-making.

(10) Oil-pressing.
(11) Bee-keeping.
(12) Paper-making.
(13) Poultry, Piggery and Goat-rearing.
(14) Cattle-rearing.
(15) Wool-weaving.

There may be other village industries and this is only an illustrative list. Now, some of these will be more important than the others and some can be done only in certain areas and under certain conditions. None of these is a new item and they are all going on almost everywhere but in many cases our village craftsmen make no progress with their technique, patterns or designs. The need therefore is to give them the assistance of trained technicians and artists. New types of village goods suited to new needs and tastes in the villages themselves and outside should be produced with better technique, materials and artistry. Workers trained in the higher technical schools and in Schools of Art should be made available by the department. Most of the village industries can thus be made more productive, remunerative and artistic. Wherever possible, and under careful planning cheap electricity should be made available for certain village industries. Care should, however, be taken to see that the use of power does not uproot village economy but only sustain and strengthen it on its own ground.

Paddy-husking and flour-grinding, oil-pressing through the bullock-ghani and paper-making may here be considered to show what can be done to improve them and still keep them in the village background. Research and experiments have been conducted in regard to these village industries by the All-India Village Industries' Association in Maganwadi, Wardha. The hand-chakki for paddy-husking and flour-grinding is still the village-chakki but it has been improved almost beyond recognition. There are new ball-bearing devices and adjustable screws fitted into the chakki. Less physical energy can work the new chakki and yet get from it increased production. But it is still the chakki and it has not been thrown away in favour of rice-mills. The same is true in regard to the bullock-ghani. Where two bullocks were necessary for a ghani, only one is needed now because there are ball-bearing movements and certain other devices introduced in the old ghani. One man or woman can work two ghanis, because of certain easy automatic adjustments and yet the cost of the new ghani or its mechanism has not been so much changed, that it cannot continue to be the village oil press. It is still the village ghani but more efficient, more productive and more remunerative. The same has been done with paper-making, in which the raw materials used are always waste like rotten old gunny bags, tailors' cuttings, paper cuttings, etc.

This then appears to be the sensible thing to do with village industries, to take them on their own ground and then make them more productive and remunerative. The village oil press or ghani

and the hand chakki are village industries of the utmost importance in village economy. The Grama Sevak should therefore begin with taking up these two items. He should first of all make the improved chakki and the ghani in the village itself with local carpenters, blacksmiths and materials taking technical help from the All-India Village Industries' Association or from those trained by the Association. Only where this is impossible readymade chakkis and ghanis may be obtained from outside. At the two Village Industries' Training Centres planned to be opened at Kallupatti and Gopannapalem respectively, selected Grama Sevaks may be given the necessary training for the work and these training centres may also stock improved ghanis, chakkis, etc. The most fruitful thing to do will be to train village artisans who are engaged in various village industries at these centres in the improved methods of production. After Khadi, the Grama Sevak should concentrate on the hand chakki and the bullock-ghani. There will be nothing to prevent him from taking up any other village industry for improvement and better organization if such one is more suited to the conditions of certain villages.

IX. *Co-operation.*—Without applying the principles and methods of Co-operation there is little hope for real economic reconstruction in the villages. Co-operation was largely neglected in the old constructive programme for a variety of reasons. The chief reason was that Co-operation was too much dominated by the British Government in the old days and the Congress was continually then non-co-operating with the Government. Things are different now and the time has come to make Co-operation the basis of most village work. A beginning must now be made without delay.

The first step may be the establishment of a co-operative store in the village. It should make available to villagers most of what they really need at fair prices. Such a store should as far as possible stock only village-made goods. Where village-made articles are totally unavailable Indian-made goods may be kept. Under no circumstances should a co-operative store become the enemy of the village programme of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Such a store should stimulate and not kill village industries. For instance it should not only stock gur but stimulate gur-production. Take again soap-making, as an illustration. Every village can make its own soap and the co-operative store should stimulate soap-production in the village. It will buy stock and sell village products, thus enabling the little stream of village production to keep on moving. In other words, a good co-operative store should be linked to more and more production in the village, with village materials and resources. Technical aid may be called for from outside.

When a village has established and developed a co-operative store in the above manner, the way is clear for starting a multi-purpose co-operative society. The multi-purpose co-operative society will form now on play an ever-increasing part in village

reconstruction. It will become the overall instrument for economic organization. The Grama Sevak should study carefully how to build up a multi-purpose co-operative society and take full advantage of the expert guidance of the Co-operative department. Farm production, storage, marketing, village industries and the proper distribution of their products, etc., will all, step by step, come under the control of a sound multi-purpose co-operative society. Does not that mean that a great deal of the whole of Village Reconstruction will come under it? Building up efficient and honest multi-purpose co-operative societies will be hard and slow work. It will involve not only the training of workers but the training of the people themselves.

X. *Medical relief.*—We have referred already to sanitation and health. But medical relief is an unavoidable item. In this connexion, the Grama Sevak shoud take note of traditional cheap remedies in villages. Some of these are harmful and some quite good. They should, however, be studied without prejudice. The uses of various herbs and vegetable drugs available locally and the different methods of 'massage' should be studied.

What the villages need most are midwives and maternity centres. The Firka Development (Rural Welfare) Department should earnestly consider the training of a large number of midwives for work under it. The trained midwife may be given some training in general Grama Seva as in the Kasturba Trust and then sent to the villages. They will then be excellent Grama Sevikas. As it is, the Grama Sevak should be able to make the best use of the nearest midwife available for help in the village in which he works. Similarly he should become the link between the nearest dispensary, hospital or doctor and the people in the village who need medical aid. Some time it should be possible to provide every village or a small group of villages with a dispensary.

XI. *Harijan Ūplift,.*—Let no Grama Sevak imagine that Harijan work belongs to someone else. It is his own work. Others may be working at it. Nevertheless, he must work at it too. A great deal of Harijan work has gone on and is going on through the Harijan Sevak Sangh and other agencies and workers. In spite of all the work done so far, the conditions of life of the Harijans have not altered enough for the better. He has no land of his own, no houses worth the name, no proper employment or minimum wages and only limited freedom and little education. The whole of Harijan Uplift therefore is still in front of us. Caste still holds sway in the village, and even public wells are not yet open to Harijans everywhere. In regard to such fundamental amenities as wells, bathing places, eating houses, schools, etc., the law is now fully on the side of the Harijans and the Grama Sevak should train them to demand and obtain all his rights in and through the law. No compromise in this regard should now be tolerated. We have given orthodox and superstitious people enough time to change their minds. Moreover, caste distinctions have to be removed at

one bold stroke or not at all. When untouchability is fully removed, the wind will be taken out of the whole caste-system. Caste itself is nothing but a series of gradation of untouchability. Cent per cent untouchability created the untouchables. A little less and less of untouchability created the various Non-Brahman groups from the Sudra upward. Once you knock out untouchability as between the Brahmans and the Harijans, then all the other gradations of untouchability will go at one stroke. Take care of untouchability and the eradication of caste will largely take care of itself. The Grama Sevak should be a conscious firm, and wholehearted Harijan Sevak. Otherwise, he will betray the constructive programme at every step. He should organize inter-dining systematically and encourage inter-marriages. In regard to every item of village work, he should bring the Harijans and the others into close contact. In the Grama Seva Sanghams, in the panchayats, in the schools, in the planning and execution of every project of village work, in temples and during festivals and on marriage and other important occasions. Harijans should be encouraged to take their due place and share. Without enabling the crores of Harijans in our country to find their equal place with all others in Indian society, there is no future for India. This work is therefore of immediate and utmost importance.

XII. *Work among women.*—It is easier to work among women in the villages than in the towns and cities. In the towns, middle and upper-class women do not do any productive work and what equality they have with men is only in the sentimental plane. In the villages, the women work as hard as the men inside and outside the home. Therefore, there is some measure of economic equality between men and women in the villages. This measure of equality greatly helps in Village Reconstruction. The Grama Sevaks, however, cannot go among village women as freely as among men. They are therefore unable to enlist fully the co-operation of the women. It has therefore become imperative to have Grama Sevaks in the Firka Development Department. But till this is possible, the Grama Sevak should enlist his mother or sister or wife or some other woman-relation in his house for the purpose. The Grama Sevak should be encouraged to do this in every way. A scheme should be drawn up for the payment of small honorariums to women from the family of the Grama Sevak for such work.

The Grama Sevaks should get into touch with the workers of the Women's Welfare Department and the Kasturba Trust, wherever possible. They should work in the closest co-operation wtih such trained women workers as are already in the field. It has now become urgently necessary to set up a small liaison committee to effect the maximum co-ordination and co-operation among the Firka Development (Rural Welfare) Department, the Women's Welfare Department and the Kasturba Trust.

Adult education work must take special care of village women. Education among village girls is much less than among village boys. Village women have grown up in ignorance of many matters

which are of vital consequence to them and to the village. When a male adult comes for education, it is only an individual who is reformed; but when a woman comes, we get the whole family.

XIII. *Village recreation.*—This is a much neglected item in all village work. Its importance, however, cannot be overstated. Life is not merely work and toil but also rest and recreation. The villager works hard but gets hardly any entertainment or recreation. This is fatal to his body and mind. Because there are no entertainments or recreation in the village, he walks into the nearest towns for the same. Entertainments and recreations in towns are costly and often harmful. Grama Sevaks should therefore organize rural games, tournaments, drama, exhibitions, Katha-Kalakshepams, etc. Entertainments and recreations should be collective to enable large numbers of people either to take part or witness them. Games and entertainments which are only for the few should be avoided. 'Chedu-gudu', 'Kitti', wrestling and boxing matches, competitions in running, jumping and putting the weight, etc., are illustrative of what will suit the villager. These must be organized properly and under good auspices. Suitable dramas can revolutionize the mental outlook in the village. A moving drama, picturing the cruelty of the caste people and the sufferings of the Harijans, can do more to secure support for Harijans than a lot of other work. We must create the technique of a new drama for the village with real educational potentiality.

In any case let no Grama Sevak neglect to organize village recreations and entertainments. A small open-air theatre, consisting simply of a little built-up platform under the trees, may be very useful. The idea that a big shed, elaborate dresses, etc., are needed for a good dramatic performance should be totally given up.

XIV. *Village education.*—Village education in India is progressively becoming Basic Education. The Central and State Governments are now spreading Basic Education. The whole of primary and elementary education in the land will become Basic Education. The Grama Sevak should try to know what is Basic Education. He should have some idea of its principles and methods. Wherever there is a Basic Training School or a Basic school nearby, the Grama Sevak should get into touch with it. He will find much to learn there and he himself will be able to help in developing Basic Education. He can, for instance, recruit the best youngmen and women for the Basic Training schools in his area and equally help in bringing children into the Basic schools. But even where there is no Basic Training school or a Basic school, he has good work to do to promote education in the village. The Firka Development (Rural Welfare) Scheme has stimulated already village education. Village schools require primarily buildings, teachers and children. In all these the Grama Sevak can help. He has already done it in many places. A school building becomes possible as soon as the Grama Sevak can bring people together and fire them with the idea that no village should be without a school. He should also induce parents and guardians to send their children

to the school. Till compulsory primary education is introduced everywhere, it will be the duty of the Grama Sevak to actively recruit children for the village school. The Grama Sevak will let the people know what assistance they can legitimately expect from the departments concerned for putting up school buildings, getting grants, trained teachers and equipment.

XV. *Organizational technique.*—This is a big subject and there can be different opinions in regard to it. But certain fundamental principles can be laid down. The first such principle is that any organization in the village for village improvement must be of the people, by the people and for the people. Officials and experts should only guide and help. This has been stressed already.

It is of the utmost importance that, the villager should be made to realize that whatever work goes on in the village is his own work, which he himself has thought out, studied, planned and executed. Thus alone can the villager grow in responsibility and in self-reliance. The Grama Sevak should function merely as an instrument to awaken the mind of the villager and to train him to do all things necessary for himself. Our object is to move forward to a time when no Grama Sevak from outside will be needed in any village. Therefore as the Grama Sevak goes on with his work, he must take care that he does not obtrude too much into the picture. He must remain as a vital force behind and, all the time, push forward the villager to think, plan and work. The temptation will be irresistible for the Grama Sevak, specially if he is clever and capable, to do too many things himself. The temptation must be resisted. As the work goes on developing, the internal and autonomous organization in the village should grow stronger and stronger, so that ultimately the village will take on almost everything into its own hands.

The two basic units of organization available in the village under the Firka Development (Rural Welfare) Scheme are the Grama Seva Sangham and the Panchayat. The Panchayat is the final unit of State organization in the village. The Grama Seva Sangham is the peoples' counter-part to it.

If the village panchayat is inefficient or corrupt, then the poison will infect the whole of democracy in India. The Central Cabinet and the State Cabinets will have the roofs of their strength in the Village Panchayats. The Grama Sevak should be able to carry conviction to village adults that the Grama Seva Sangham and the Grama Panchayat are the test of the integrity and efficiency of the village upon which the strength of the whole nation depends. Elections must be fair without any undue influence corrupting the little seed of democracy in the village. Only the best men and women should be elected. There must be complete loyalty to those thus freely put in power. If the Grama Sevak will thus help to clean up the village cell of democracy in India making it incorruptible and efficient he would have helped greatly in making India a great and good nation. The Grama

Sevak, the Grama Seva Sangham and the Grama Panchayat must thus realize the full significance of their work and contribution.

XVI. *The Santi Sena.*—Even now peace and security in the village constitute more a local problem than one for the Police station. It is impossible for the police ordinarily or for the military in a crisis to reach the villages in time or usefully. That is why there is a case for starting a Santi Sena in every village or in groups of villages. A Santi Sena is best defined here as a unit of the 'Peace Police'. In a larger context, the Santi Sena units working together may become a peace brigade. It will have no arms but its training will have something in common with the training of soldiers. There will be drilling and marching and training in quick group action. Ordinarily the Santi Sena will carry on some item of constructive work or other. It would be a very good thing for the Santi Sena to specialize in sanitation work in normal times. Sanitation as training for the Santi Sena has the added advantage that it provides for group work. At times of danger or crisis the Santi Sena will take charge of the peace and security in the village, meeting local organized violence with local organized non-violence. Every member of the Grama Seva Sangh should join the Santi Sena, as also others who understand and are willing to co-operate. A good Santi Sena unit in a village will be an excellent test of the success of our village work.

XVII. *Village culture.*—If villages are important and the majority of the people must live in them for long time to come, then surely, village culture becomes a vital element in National Culture. We have to re-discover the roots of the old village culture. They can be discovered in the folklore, songs and dances and in the many traditions and habits of the people. They can be discovered also in the high artistic skills of our village craftsmen. A good deal of old poetry and music are rural. There is even to-day a good deal of artistic and cultural talent in the village. These must be discovered and encouraged to take up fresh creative actively. It has, therefore, become imperative to establish a network of little cultural centres in the villages. We have already referred to the need for small open air theatres in the rural areas. Government should encourage and even undertake the printing and publishing of suitable literature to give an impetus to cultural revival in the villages. Talented authors and artists should be enlisted to help in the movement. Here again women can play a great part. Cultural festivals and exhibitions should be organized regularly as part of the programme of Village Reconstruction.

General.—Grama Seva as outlined above is practically the whole of National Reconstruction as it affects the life of the vast majority of the people of India. It is thus a great and comprehensive programme. Such a programme will weaken nobody anywhere. Even the towns will be chastened and strengthened by such a programme. Nothing can strengthen the new Indian Republic than the strengthening of the roots of its structure in the

villages through such a programme. It will be a creative revolution vitalizing the nation throughout its life and work. Even those who want the rapid industrialization of the country can to-day draw no strength from a people, whose character, initiative and self-reliance are daily perishing before our very eyes. Even if ultimately the Constructive Programme partly sterilizes and partly transforms the very character and basis of industrialization in India, it will do so, not violently or aggressively, but by the very process of the creative and life-giving forces it will generate and spread.

CHAPTER VII.

LOOKING AHEAD.

What can the Grama Sevak look forward to? While he is concentrating his energies in reconstructing the village, the world appears to be moving in an opposite direction. While he is labouring at little points in the village, big things are happening which seem capable of wiping away all his work and the village itself. Is Village Reconstruction some patch-work for the present only, which cannot fit into the inevitable future? Is the analysis of the situation in India, as made in the previous chapters, unreal and are we wasting time, energy and money in trying to do the impossible? Can Khadi and Village Industries survive against the mills and the factories? Can the village itself hold its ground any more against the fierce competitions beating up against it from the towns and the new ways of life which belong to the towns? These are some of the questions which might well trouble the mind of any Grama Sevak, as he goes on with his work slowly and laboriously from day-to-day inside the village.

There is no doubt that the Grama Sevak should try to understand something of the answer to these questions. He should know that the way he has chosen has everything to recommend it. The facts of India imperatively point in the direction of a social economy based on the economic and social well-being of the villages. The whole of the arithmetic in regard to the villages must convince anyone that they cannot any more be ignored and that as year passes year they will have to be reckoned with more and more. Let us also remember that we have now in India adult franchise. That means that 80 per cent of the votes are in the villages. Whatever public opinion exists now in the rural areas is wide awake and in a challenging mood. The more village adults wake up and are educated in all that concerns them, the more they will demand that, the villages must be kept in the centre of all National Planning. The villagers are shrewd people and it will not be possible to neglect them any more. They know Gandhi

and something of the Constructive Programme which he tried to work out with all the strength in him. Even to-day his name and his ideas count more with them than anything else. Wherever they have tasted something of the Constructive Programme, they have found it good and inspired by the utmost love and goodwill towards them. Moreover, as already pointed out, the challenge of the situation in the villages is for all that can be done to be done here and now. May be, therefore, it is not those who are working out the Constructive Programme in the villages who are likely to be in the wrong. May be, it is those, who are building up urban economy, as now on the ruination of the villages, who are more likely to be in the wrong and against whom the rising tide of discontent and anger from the villages may turn. The facts are with us and the needs justify what we do. Take for instance, the biggest of all our problems, that of the under-employment or the total unemployment of numerous millions of people in the country. It has been roughly computed that nearly 50 per cent of adults in the rural areas are either only half employed or totally unemployed. The question of giving these millions profitable and productive work is the biggest question of all facing Administrators and National Planners. Is it possible to give them profitable and productive employment under the centralized system and methods of modern industrialization? Or, is it more reasonable and practical to do so under a system of decentralized production and distribution as in the Constructive Programme? This is the crux of the question. Can India be industrialized in the manner in which England and America have become industrialized? Even the most enthusiastic advocates of industrialization have begun to admit that in the peculiar conditions of India, small-scale industries spread throughout the country would be a much better plan than the introduction of mass production in big factories. Centralized production and distribution will not on the whole suit India. Decentralized production and distribution will certainly suit India better. May be, it will not possible for India to turn away completely from industrialization. It will be imperative, therefore, to build up an economy truly balanced between rural conditions and needs for a certain measure of industrialization. Even for striking such a healthy balance we shall have to press on with the Constructive Programme to the utmost of our strength. Otherwise, the rapid and unbridled growth of industrialization will relentlessly swamp Village Reconstruction. Unless the villages in India learn to stand on their own feet and to demand their rights in no uncertain terms, they will also be ultimately destroyed by the growth of cities and industrialization as elsewhere in the world. But, if the villages are organized, self-reliant and capable of exercising their full influence through the majority of the votes they have, then village economy and industrial economy may come together to build up a truly balanced economy.

Gandhi knew India as perhaps no one else has known India. He was no mere dreamer or extreme idealist. He called himself "a practical idealist". His Constructive Programme based on

the twin pillars of self-reliance and self-sufficiency is one, the soundness of which cannot be easily challenged. But Gandhi himself was never a static. He never conceived the Constructive Programme also as static. Therefore, while we can hold fast to the fundamental principles Gandhiji laid down in the Constructive Programme, the programme itself may have to be re-adjusted to new conditions and new needs. But clearly unlimited and uncontrolled industrialization has not brought the world to any heaven of peace or happiness. On the contrary, it has generated fierce competitions, rivalries and conflicts which are pushing the world to the brink of unparallelled disaster. Let not the Constructive Worker therefore be apologetic about his ideology and methodology, when he is challenged to reckon with the modern world of industrial production. He might as well challenge the advocates of rapid industrialization in India to reckon with the consequences of such a programme in a country like India in the context of conditions created by industrialization all the world over. May be, the Constructive Programme will require modifications. We shall have to make such modifications as they are proved to be necessary. But our programme and our methods are deliberately fashioned to create a just social order through peaceful methods. We must therefore persist in the work with the full conviction that we are moving in the right direction and that our methods are good for India. Europe and America built up their present civilization under the stress of a history very different from the history of India. Even if we wish to and it were desirable, we cannot imitate them. There are many things we can take over from their experience which will do us a lot of good. We shall have to take over their scientific outlook, the high standards of production and the methods of co-operation and co-ordination, etc. Equally, we shall have to reject their fiercely competitive spirit, their technique of exploitation of weaker and less developed countries and their tendency to go to war to set right the affairs of the world.

Not only in India but throughout Asia the rural background is still very real and must be reckoned with. In China and even in Japan a great deal of production goes on the basis of decentralization. India under Gandhi put the principle of decentralization as the very basis of a new social economy. The experiment in India, therefore, is of great consequence to the whole of Asia. It has also a meaning and a challenge for the whole world. If the future of the world must be one of peace and justice, Mahatma Gandhi's work in India in which the Constructive Programme occupies the most important place has a profound and significant meaning for all those who labour to build up such a world. The Grama Sevak in the village is thus a symbol of a creative revolution.

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